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AS THE CROW FLIES

By CORNELIA MEIGS

HELGA AND THE WHITE PEACOCK (A Play)

THE KINGDOM OF THE WINDING ROAD

MASTER SIMON'S GARDEN

THE NEW MOON

THE POOL OF STARS

RAIN ON THE ROOF

THE STEADFAST PRINCESS (A Play)

THE WINDY HILL



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A TRIAL OF STRENGTH
(CHAPTER XI)

AS THE CROW FLIES

BY

CORNELIA MEIGS

New York

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1929

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AS THE CROW FLIES

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CHAPTER I

“CAN A MAN BUY RUNNING WATER?”

The line of tents under the cottonwood trees stood white and hot under the blazing sunshine of a summer afternoon. Not even the big river, sliding past the encampment in a mile-wide expanse of muddy, brown water, could cool the heavy, lifeless air, but only gave back the heat in a reflected glare of fierce brightness. The lightly hung leaves of the cottonwoods, so easily swung by the veriest breath of passing wind, were motionless now. Only the feathery green of the willows along the shore looked soft and cool; yet even here was witness of the merciless power of the sun. The river had shrunk away from its usual waterline, which ordinarily washed the roots of the willows, and showed now a wide band of bare mud, dried and cracked into a thousand fantastic patterns. The long keel boat, lying at the water's edge, was half its length out of water, so far had the river drawn away since first it had been moored there.

Quiet and languor prevailed almost everywhere on that long summer afternoon in August of the year eighteen hundred and five. Only within the first tent of the row was a scene very different;

for here a young officer was throwing together his possessions in such breathless haste as seemed to take no account of the heat which was fairly stifling under the dusty canvas.

"Can you not hurry a little, Tryon?" he kept saying to the tall orderly who was assisting him; yet he was forced to add, every few minutes, "Have you seen my second blunderbuss? There should be a bag of heavy rifle balls here somewhere. I have mislaid the bundle of quills for pens."

Big Michael Tryon required no urging to make haste. He was so large that he seemed to half fill the narrow space within the tent; but he moved about with the easy precision of a soldier long used to the cramped quarters of army life. He produced, without trouble, the missing blunderbuss and the mislaid sheaf of quills; he rolled and roped the bundles of blankets, saying little and accomplishing far more than his headlong superior. The young Lieutenant began to change hastily into his dress uniform, all the while looking wistfully at the buckskin shirt and big boots laid ready for him. Under the camp table, a small dog had taken refuge, a curly black spaniel. He regarded his master's every move with intent eyes, but wisely kept from under his hurrying feet.

Michael gave a last loving rub to the burnished sword and held up the much-braided coat. The young man's fingers were stumbling among the buttons as he strove to fasten them.

"Is there really need of such haste, sir?" Michael Tryon ventured to protest in his deep, rumbling

voice. "That big river out yonder has been running for a long age past, waiting for you to come and seek out whence it flows. It can surely wait, without disaster, for a few hours more."

The tone of respectful affection and the officer's answering smile told plainly that these two were comrades-in-arms of long standing. Ever since Zebulon Pike, at the age of fifteen, had begun a soldier's life in his father's regiment, Michael Tryon, a grizzled war-worn veteran even then, had taken especial charge of him. Among winding trails, frontier posts and Indian skirmishes all up and down the Ohio and Cumberland valleys, these two had marched and camped and fought in such close companionship that half of the young officer's knowledge of military arts was drawn from the storehouse of the old private's vast and rough experience. In contrast to his tall, gray-headed Irish orderly, the Lieutenant, very slim and very fair, looked even younger than the years which he actually possessed.

At the old soldier's protest, he restrained a little of his excited hurry; but he shook his head with energy as he answered.

"The river can wait, but I cannot. There has been such endless talk over this matter, such dragging preparation, that I begin to believe the broad Mississippi will fairly run dry before we are able to set off."

"It cannot be long now," Michael replied, "and the big river is yet running fairly full, a mile of

water, at least, from bank to bank. She is calling to you even now."

Both were silent for a moment to listen to that low-pitched, deeply-murmuring voice which could always be heard as the background of all smaller, shriller noises of the camp, the sound of a vast flood of waters moving with steady, enormous power, onward and onward forever.

Except for the river, the hot world outside was very still. Along the white road, under an almost blinding sun, three mules were shambling lazily, their hoofs stepping softly in the deep dust which rose and hung above them in a long cloud. The faint jingle-jangle of the leader's bell came slowly nearer, accompanied now and again by the drowsily urging voice of the driver who bestrode the hindmost of the three.

"Yonder come our beans and flour and bacon," announced Lieutenant Pike. "There is now but one thing more to do, to ride into St. Louis and receive General Wilkinson's written orders, which he says are finally ready. I will need less than an hour to go thither, if I make haste, and less than an hour to return. Perhaps I must spend with him the space of——"

He stopped for a moment to reflect. In spite of the look of anxiety upon his hard, sunburned face, Michael Tryon's countenance relaxed into a smile which he sought to conceal by stooping over the roll of blankets.

"The General cannot keep me more than a few minutes," Pike concluded. "After all the talk there

has been in this matter, there surely is nothing further to say. Tell Kennerman and the men to be ready in two hours' time, Tryon, and have my horse brought. See that the mules are unloaded the moment they reach the camp. Bid everyone make haste."

Michael Tryon was a soldier faithful to duty; but in spite of that, when his young superior had galloped off in a rolling cloud of dust, he took a most leisurely way to the next tent and told Sergeant Kennerman that "the Lieutenant says he will be here again in two hours, but you know what chance he has when the General begins to talk. It will be two hours and more before old Windbags has done with him, and then it will be too late to set forth on this day. You can yet hope to sleep another night under canvas, Henry Kennerman, though it will break the young lad's heart to be kept waiting."

It was the expedition for the first exploration of the upper Mississippi upon which Zebulon Pike and his command of twenty men were about to embark. Two years before, after long negotiation, there had been concluded an historic bargain between a long, lean, grave American President and a small, energetic, and fantastically ambitious French Emperor, that transaction known as the Louisiana Purchase. Just what he had bought or how great was the extent of the new domain, neither President Jefferson nor anyone else could really tell. All that anyone knew was that he had purchased two great rivers and the lands pertaining to them. It was necessary

to discover from what source these rivers came and who dwelt upon their banks. Already one exploring party had set out, in the spring of the year before, to examine the lands and the peoples of the valley of the Missouri. Zebulon Pike had watched with envy the departure of Captains Lewis and Clark, and he had thought of them often as far advanced into the wilderness, while he fumed and fretted in his own great desire to be gone.

Of the Mississippi, whose headwaters he was to seek out, there was not much more known than of the Missouri. Reports came, through traders, that above the pouring in of the Missouri's muddy flood, the Mississippi was a clear, winding stream, draining a land of high bluffs and green prairies and that, far to the north, it flowed out of a limitless forest. The Sioux Indians dwelt upon its banks, and the Sac-and-Fox tribes, while farther yet to the northward dwelt the Chippeway, a fierce woodland race of which scarcely anything was known save that they were desperate fighters. Hidden also in those far woods were other enemies of the new Government, Frenchmen and British subjects, who had established intercourse with the Indians and were carrying home to their own countries the profits of a great fur trade. They were, as well, stirring up the red men to ever-renewed enmity against the people of the United States.

Whoever went exploring thither in the name of President Jefferson was directed to make peace treaties with the Indians, any Indians, all Indians whom he should chance to meet, a somewhat diffi-

cult mission for an untried officer who knew nothing of their ways or the languages of any of them. He was, moreover, to establish the authority of the United States over those British trading posts which had considered themselves to be safely hidden in the dense northern forests. And he was to seek out the sources of the Mississippi and find thus the northern limits of the new possessions, determining from what cradle sprang this giant among rivers. It was the last errand which appealed the most vividly to the questing heart of Zebulon Pike.

The preparations had dragged for months; but even the slowest things come finally to an end. There was no one wise enough to know that the expedition was planning to set forth in the wrong sort of boat, at the worst time of year, with insufficient equipment, and with no definitely thought-out plans. Men higher in command than Lieutenant Pike had decreed the time and the manner of his going; while he himself was cheerfully unaware of the faulty arrangements. No one, save a handful of French traders and a number of completely silent Indians, was really familiar with the upper Mississippi, and these would say nothing, since they had no wish to see the expedition succeed.

"Let the new masters take possession of the river as best they can," was the whispered opinion which went from one to another of those who knew of the enterprise and who were learned enough in wood and water lore to see how blindly the arrangements were being made. The difficulties and dangers were doubled and trebled by the scanty knowledge of all

who had to do with the undertaking; but of such matters the young commander thought not at all. He knew little of Indians, since the mere practice of fighting red men gives small knowledge of their real nature. He knew less of the river; but his one idea, after all this heartbreaking delay, was to go forward.

Zebulon Pike came galloping at hot speed into the town, protesting under his breath when he was forced to check his horse in the narrow streets which were filled with a bustling procession of carts, mules, busy merchants hurrying about their business, tall, free-striding Indians in blankets and feathers, and bent squaws with deerskin packs or papooses hanging from their shoulders. Only a few years before, St. Louis had been the little trading post of Lacledé's Village, but it was already becoming a busy, crowded, frontier city into which rolled the great fur trade of all the great new West.

As the Lieutenant brought his horse to a halt before one of the few substantial houses of the hastily built town, he was forced, in spite of his haste, to stop for an instant's admiring inspection of an Indian who was just passing. He was tall, vigorous, and graceful, with clean-cut features and the splendid, easy stride of unhampered strength. The dyed feathers in his hair, the bright-beaded moccasins upon his feet, the proud swing of his gay blanket made him a picture not easily to be passed by. He himself had paused for a moment to speak to Pierre Choteau, a slim Frenchman, the enterprising grandson of that first fur trader who had brought prosperity to St. Louis. The Indian was evidently a

familiar friend of the young merchant, for he spoke easy French to him. Few of his race cared to learn any tongue but their own, and such as did would never willingly speak it except to some trusted intimate.

It seemed that Choteau had been trying to explain to a somewhat bewildered Indian mind the facts of the Louisiana Purchase, for Pike caught such words as "treaty with France and Spain," and "taken over the valleys of the Mississippi and Missouri."

The tall Indian threw up his hand in a vivid gesture of disdain. "Can a man buy running water?" he exclaimed and strode away.

Choteau, left behind, nodded greeting to Lieutenant Pike and smiled broadly.

"That is as near as they can come to understanding our change of government," he said. "French, Spanish, Americans, it means little to them who holds dominion over the country which they are all sure is theirs alone. A strange, silent people; they know a thousand things which we could never guess at; and they fail to understand the simplest matters which we attempt to teach them."

Zebulon Pike looked after the stately, disappearing figure as the Indian swung down the street.

"I should like to understand them," he declared. "I could ask for little more, on this journey of mine, than to come back feeling that I had made a few such men to be my friends."

"You ask for more than you think," replied Choteau. "My grandfather, my father, and I, we

have all gathered knowledge of them and yet find them a mystery still. When it comes to gifts and trinkets, they are like children; when it comes to fighting, they are like wild animals; when it comes to their dignity and their own sense of honor, they are, in pride, like princes of the blood royal."

He had begun to walk on but looked over his shoulder to say, "The fellow is right. Monsieur Jefferson thinks he has bought two rivers, yet they will never be his or yours until you have conquered them. You will have to conquer them not by force of arms, but by slow knowledge of the secrets of their forests, of the peoples on their banks, of the ways of the rivers themselves. I wish you good luck in your attempt to solve the riddles of that baffling Mississippi."

As Zebulon Pike entered the big, white house, so peremptory were his demands upon the ceremonious orderly stationed at the inner door, that he was brought immediately into the presence of General Wilkinson. The signed orders were actually handed to him at last; and now it seemed that one more moment of delay would be the very death of him. Yet, just as Michael Tryon had guessed and had betrayed the knowledge with an ill-concealed grin, the restless Lieutenant was obliged to remain for the whole of a desperate hour, sitting uneasily across the table from the General, listening respectfully to what his commander had to say.

He had long cherished a great, almost a worshipful, regard for his superior officer, General Wilkinson, whom he deemed a very able and a very

brave soldier. This regard was not shared by the older sergeants and corporals, by the scarred and veteran privates, who had seen more of soldiering than had their Lieutenant. General Wilkinson had served through the Revolution; and so had these battered warriors, who, at night, beside their fires, passed tales of the doughty commander which that gentleman would have been little pleased to overhear. Never before, even in his inmost thoughts, had Pike voiced even the breath of a criticism of his much-admired superior. But today, in his chafing impatience, there grew up within him the irresistible idea that the General was a man of over-many words. And how could it be otherwise when his final instructions were at last in his pocket and when there lay so immediately before him the beginning of his great enterprise. All that General Wilkinson had to say seemed small and inadequate beside the soaring hopes that filled his heart. Behind all those long, easily flowing sentences with which the General was discussing Mr. Jefferson's great purchase, Zebulon Pike's mind kept coming back to the Indian's brief, keen summary, "Can a man buy running water?"

The big room was cool by reason of its generous space and long shuttered windows, but it could not relieve the hot unrest within him. General Wilkinson, offering him a tinkling glass of cool refreshment which Pike was too impatient to taste, General Wilkinson, talking on in a monotonous flow of high-sounding words, seemed, for once, to be a far lesser man than his young admirer had so long considered

him. It appeared, indeed, that he would never have done. The General was not giving any final instructions, for it was plain that he had none to give. He was merely going over certain anecdotes concerning his own part in various public matters, telling casually of incidents in which the wisdom and prowess of General Wilkinson, so he modestly admitted, had snatched victory from the very jaws of disaster.

"Has he forgotten that I have heard that one before?" reflected Zebulon Pike and immediately reproached himself for such a comment, even within his own mind.

Yet it did seem that the General, usually so skillful with words, had begun to repeat himself, that he was, for once, over-eager to impress his listener. It was as though he cared little what was before his companion but that he wished, above all things, to have Lieutenant Pike carry with him into the wilderness a vivid impression of how great, how brave, and how wise was the man who had sent him. Pike, looking at him across the table, thought suddenly that General Wilkinson's face looked strained. It was a handsome face; yet the younger man could not forbear noticing that it had grown, lately, a thought too fat, a shade too red. Once more he reproached himself harshly. Then, since there came a moment of silence, a pause which might be taken for a signal of dismissal, he got up hastily.

The General observed him with a faintly bitter smile.

"I see that you will not dally upon your way," he said.

The young officer was now in too great a hurry to notice that bitterness.

"I feel that it is most important for us to set out," he replied simply. "I hope to be off before sundown."

The great man arose also from his chair, and, with his most gracious manner of dignity and condescension and with some real affection, which that grand manner could not entirely hide, he shook hands with his young Lieutenant.

"I wish you the fairest of fortunes," he said.

Lieutenant Pike muttered some stumbling words to voice his loyalty, his admiration, and his determination to offer the best that was within him. Then he was away across the long room, striding with such haste that he almost collided, at the door, with a tall and richly dressed gentleman who had been awaiting his turn to speak to General Wilkinson.

Once in the anteroom, however, Pike stopped to make sure that those precious orders, which had seemed to be burning his pocket for the last hour, were actually safe. The door was just closing, and he heard the General's voice, dry, cold, and matter-of-fact.

"If he comes back, he can be made of great use to us."

Of whom were they speaking, he wondered for an instant; could it be of himself? He wasted small thought upon that puzzle, for his mind was far too

full of things of greater moment, while he ran, two steps at a time, down the stairs to where his horse was waiting before the door. It was five miles to the camp and well after noon already. But at last he was done with orders and instructions, with waiting upon the will of other people, and could now go forward at his own will.

He stopped in a narrow street of shops, sleepy in the merciless heat, and bargained for some last articles of which he suddenly remembered the need. The drowsy proprietor looked somewhat astonished at some of the items on the list.

"Ten pounds of vermillion coloring?" he said incredulously and added with frank willingness to offer advice, "For a man who is going to treat with the Indians there is but one thing to carry—rum, and more rum, and then more rum yet."

"I purpose to try a different plan," returned Pike stiffly and went on to the next articles upon the list.

The man of the shop assured him that the commodities would be sent to the camp immediately, but Pike, made wise by past experience, waited to see the mule loaded and actually started upon the way before he mounted his horse again. Even that would not have been accomplished without the magic influence of a gold piece, offered as an inducement beyond the ordinary price, and produced from the very slender wealth of the Lieutenant's private treasury. The proprietor took it rather suspiciously and rung it upon the counter to make sure that the coin was genuine. The rich, golden jingle seemed to satisfy him, for a broad smile spread across his lean

countenance. The musical sound also galvanized into life the black-faced mule driver, nodding in his tilted chair outside the door, and even seemed to arouse the slumbering mule, tied in a small spot of shade beyond the door of the shop. Both appeared to answer instantly to that delicious sound; for they started out of their August-afternoon stupor and set off, almost willingly, down the crooked street, across the white, hot, empty square and turned into the riverside road which led to the camp.

Having seen them thus far upon their way, Zebulon Pike left them to gallop forward, to fling himself from his horse at the door of his tent, and to call loudly for Michael.

"We are going," he cried. "Is Kennerman ready? Is the boat pushed out? The orders are in my pocket; the General has—has come to an end of his instructions at last, and we are off."

"When?" cried Michael in sharp surprise. "It is only four hours to sunset. It is Friday! Surely you are not going to set forth today?"

"When?" repeated Pike. "Why now, to be sure." He repeated the word exultingly. "Now! Presidents, Emperors, Kings—and Generals, they have all had their say; but the talk and the preparations are at last come to an end."

He began to divest himself of his uniform, while Michael stepped forward to take the sword so hastily unbuckled and to fold the gold-laced coat so vehemently cast aside. The black spaniel, still remaining under the table, began to fidget and whine, as though becoming almost unbearably anxious lest

these preparations might mean that he was to be left behind.

The men, in the nearby tents, having received the order for immediate departure, were making less hasty preparation. Some were eager, some were grumbling; but none were anxious to come out, any sooner than was necessary, into the white glare of sunshine which lay upon the open spaces of the river bank.

Michael Tryon was packing the discarded uniform among the blankets, with a look in his eyes scarcely different from the dumb anxiety of the little dog. Once or twice he opened his lips to speak, then closed them firmly as if in the knowledge that it was of no use. But at length, when the final roll had been tied, when the last buckle had been strapped, while Lieutenant Pike was buckling on the big hunting knife which was to replace his sword, Michael, suddenly, could be silent no longer.

"An army would scarce be safe where you are going," he said, the words seeming to break from him by the force of deep feeling, "and yet the General is sending you with only twenty men."

"With nineteen, besides myself," corrected Pike. "That is the true difficulty which troubles you so greatly, my poor Michael." He had fastened the knife and now took up the big pistols which lay upon the table. "Were it twenty-one men who were going, then the whole matter would appear in a greatly altered light. Were Private Michael Tryon, of the army of the United States, to be a member

of the company, there would be no more warnings, no dark hints of unknown dangers! Is it not so?"

Michael nodded sheepishly. By definite orders from General Wilkinson, only young men were to be of that party, which was to endure toil, privation, and long marches beyond even the ordinary practice. Therefore Michael, who could not conceal the fact of his thirty-five years' service as a fighting man, could not hope to be of the number. He still clung, however, to a last, desperate hope.

"You could easily find room for another," he urged, in final, frantic pleading. "Twenty-one is not much more than twenty, in a seventy-foot boat. Oh, sir, could it not be that even yet, you might manage to take me with you?"

With a look of infinite regret, Zebulon Pike shook his head.

"Not this time, Michael," he said, as gently as though the battered old warrior were a child pleading for some indulgence which was not for his own good.

"And will there ever be another time?" cried Michael desperately. "Shall we ever march or camp or fight in company again? You need me, sir, you know that you have need of me."

The affection and comradeship bred of many hard years of toil together, was in the smile which young Pike gave him.

"An officer always needs faithfulness and friendship and loyalty," he said. "But orders are orders, and I must even go forward with less of all those three, than I would have if you were there."

Michael shook his head in helpless protest. As he spoke again, there fell from him, unwittingly, that same phrase which General Wilkinson had used.

"If you come back," he said, "you will admit that you did not do well in leaving me behind."

If Lieutenant Pike heard that "if," it did not, even now, make any impression upon his tense mind. He had no need to answer, for the very tone of Michael's voice was quite without hope. The old soldier flung a roll of bedding over his shoulder, took up a bale of other luggage in each hand, and stooped to the opening of the tent.

"The mule has just come in from St. Louis," he announced, "and I see Bradley carrying the bale down to the boat."

"Ask Bradley to see that everything is aboard," replied the Lieutenant from within. "Tell Kennerman to call out the men and get the boat afloat. Can you take this extra musket?" He spoke to the waiting dog, whose suspense had now reached an agonizing pitch, but who still did not stir from his place.

"Come, Pluto," he said.

The spaniel, with a succession of rapturous yelps, came charging out from under the table, to leap and bark about his master and then to race down to the boat. Michael regarded the delighted dog with a bitterly jealous eye.

"Him to be going, and me to stop here!" he muttered. But he had made his final plea and did not, now, protest aloud.

The last bales, boxes, and kegs were loaded into the long keel boat. The men gathered; the three hunting dogs were got aboard; the heavy craft was shoved out until she swung lightly in the current. Lieutenant Pike, laden with his final and most precious possessions, embarked the last but one, for the black spaniel jumped aboard behind him. A cluster of soldiers stood on the bank to watch them go, but there was no ceremony of departure. The young commander ordered briefly,

“Push off,” and the long, heavily laden vessel was on its way.

The air above the wide water quivered with the still heat, as the boat came drifting out into the current. She felt the tremendous force of the stream and dropped down a few yards as the men dug their oars into the water; then she began to respond to the pull of eighteen stout rowers; she gathered way and sent out a sharp arrowhead of ripples from each side of her prow. Thus she commenced to draw steadily away upon her journey, while those who were left behind watched her dwindle, until the flash of oars could no longer be distinguished, until she had become a mere dancing dot upon the wide, muddy waters, breasting the current on her way toward unknown lands.

Lieutenant Zebulon Pike felt his surging impatience dropping away at the moment that the boat began to move forward beneath him. He had given the tiller into the hands of Sergeant Kennerman, and was pulling an oar amongst the rowers. He could feel his vessel straining against the strength

of the stream and gathering more and more speed as the blades began to swing steadily together. His surging impulse for haste grew less and less as he pulled with long, regular strokes, as mile after mile of the big river fell behind them. The fierce heat of the sun grew milder; the quivering air began to cool; the welcome twilight finally came stealing over the water. They had long since lost sight of the encampment and of the sparse dwellings which were scattered here and there along the shore for the first dozen miles. -

They were rounding a tree-covered headland when the sun finally dropped to the horizon. A rude cabin, on the ridge of the wooded hill, caught the last rays upon its windows and seemed all on fire as they passed the bend and came into a solitary wilderness. A faintly cool wind stole across the surface of the water; the stars appeared one by one overhead, as the boat went forward with scarcely a sound. Young Zebulon Pike felt still and calm at last and completely at peace.

It was long after dark when they stopped to make camp for the night at the head of a sand-bar island. They moored the boat close to the eastern shore of the stream, where the willows came down to the edge of the water. Fires were soon burning in the dry sand, suppers were cooking, voices and laughter were sounding all up and down the bar. Lieutenant Pike sought out a quiet place by himself, where the close-growing trees hung down to touch the water. Here, by the light of a torch of driftwood stuck into

the sand, he prepared to write the first entry of his record of the journey.

The soft breeze stirred the leaves; there were small sounds all about him—birds going to roost, perhaps, or little field mice coming down to drink at the river. At least it was so that he interpreted the faint noises, such of them that he heard at all. He was so weary and drowsy from the long day of varied excitement that his written words were very brief, merely stating that the party had set out at four o'clock in the afternoon of August ninth in the year eighteen hundred and five and that the water was very rapid. He did not think it even worthy of mention that as yet they had seen no Indians.

For a long time he sat dreaming and looking out upon the restless waters flowing past, listening to the clear sound of the current pouring over the edge of the sand bar. He was not thinking of those adventures which were before him—of the red-skinned enemies and the white against whom, from time to time, he would be forced to pit his wits, his strength, and his courage. He was reflecting only that even the great river, so faintly visible in the dark, was hostile to the prying of white men into her hidden secrets. The wide Mississippi was flinging the whole of her power against him to drive him back; and it was with the river that he must do battle the whole of the way.

CHAPTER II

THE PAINTED ARROW

Sometimes, in very quiet air, a fire burns with a flame that is almost transparent and with smoke that is nearly colorless. It was so with the little blaze which had been lit, at the edge of a bit of river beach, by Natzoon, half-grown warrior of the Sac-and-Fox tribe. He was broiling, upon the coals, a string of small catfish which he had caught upon the rapids of the big river. He lay at comfortable length in the cool, damp sand and watched the thin, almost invisible smoke as it mounted steadily above the surface of the river, climbing higher than the nodding tops of the willows and lifting even beyond the level of the wooded bluffs. The sharp eye of any lurking enemy could make nothing of that pale cloud against the equally pale blue of the midsummer sky.

An Indian, taught by long habit, must always think of the possible nearness of some hidden foe, whenever he lights a fire. He takes pride in kindling a blaze which will make the least possible flame and smoke. Natzoon's care, on that day, had, however, been only as the result of long training; for it seemed that just now, and for a brief season to come, there could be no human enemies near at hand. Had not his tribe made a truce, for a time,

with their ancient antagonists, the Sioux? And of such weaker peoples as the Iowas, the Osages, and the Kaskaskias, there was no reason to be afraid. Even the last and most formidable of these had been recently and thoroughly defeated by the head of Natzoon's tribe, the renowned Black Hawk. Therefore, it was safe today, if ever, for the Indian boy to lie at ease upon the sandy point of land under the solitary sycamore tree, to stretch his long limbs, and to watch the slender, slow-moving flame of his fire in great peacefulness and content.

Nevertheless, it was only in the half hour just past that he had been in desperate peril. He smiled as he thought of it and dug his toes into the sand, lying in easy comfort. The danger was departed, was gone crashing away through the willow thickets and across the flat lands which bordered the stream. Only a chance of fortune had saved him from death; but good luck had come in time, so that now the incident was merely one of a hundred in the daily risks and adventures of an Indian's life.

Through the whole of the sunny morning he had been paddling against the rapids, gathering a goodly catch of the perch and catfish which swam among the broad riffles. At noontime he had landed on the sandy point, gathered a handful of driftwood, and made ready to cook some of the smaller fish for his midday meal. He had gone into the willow grove at the head of the point to cut a branch upon which to string his catch and, in the act of stripping away the green bark, he had heard the sound of a snapping twig and had stiffened into tense listening.

Behind a great, fallen log something was crouching, something red-skinned, like himself, and equally wary. After a long, motionless silence, a lean figure shifted slowly, apparently thinking itself unseen, and fitted an arrow to the string of a heavy bow. With a movement like supple lightning, Natzoon ducked as the shaft sped past his head, whistling its deadly song close to his ear. His crouching adversary leaped forth from the cover of the sheltering log, while Natzoon, who was unarmed save for the knife with which he had been cleaning the fish, sought refuge in the inadequate shelter of a clump of poplar saplings. He could see desperate purpose written upon the face of the gaunt Indian who stood, baffled for a moment, in the centre of a little clearing.

The stranger was a warrior none too young, a veteran, evidently, of many a warpath and many a hunting season. His garments were so few and ragged that it was difficult to tell, through their means, of what people he might be. Yet the arrow, which stood at a slanting angle in the earth just beyond the poplars, told the tale of the man's tribe and kindred. Its tuft of feathers, dyed red and ochre, and its parti-colored shaft showed that it came from the quiver of a man of the Iowas, a people so diminished by warfare that their tradition had shrunk almost to a mere name. To be found in the hunting ground which had once been his own land, but which was now the abode of his fierce and conquering enemies, meant, for the stranger, only one of two things—he must kill or be killed. Natzoon,

crouching low among the aspen trees, knew that truth quite as well as did the other.

The boy could see very plainly the face of his assailant, as the big-limbed brave stood not more than twenty yards away, very carefully and deliberately fitting and aiming a second arrow. The man's bony countenance was seamed and lined with the marks of toil and starvation; he had the look of a wolf discovered and brought to bay. His whole hope of escape would seem to hang upon his being able to destroy the boy who had chanced upon him, before that boy could give the alarm. Yet nothing could hurry him as he made ready to launch his arrow; no nearness of danger could shake the deadliness of its aim.

As Natzoon stepped back in a last attempt to slip into a more sheltered position, his foot caught upon a crooked root, and he tumbled backward with a crackle of breaking branches. The noise brought another actor upon the scene; for it aroused a deer which had lain down to sleep comfortably in the moist shade of the poplar thicket. The wide-horned buck rose with a snort, in the first moment less frightened than indignant that its pleasant rest in the hot midday had been disturbed. When it caught, at the same moment, both sight and scent of the human beings so close at hand, it went bounding away through the underbrush, heedless of noise or concealment. Its crashing flight broke abruptly the breathless quiet which lay so heavily upon the wide bottom lands along the river. It

broke also that tense spell of danger which had held Natzoon prisoner in the clump of poplars.

The Iowa warrior had swung about on seeing the deer and had sped his arrow vainly after that flying vision of swift hoofs and of horns laid back to avoid the swinging boughs. If the Indian's expression had, a moment earlier, resembled that of a hunted wolf, it was now like that of a famished one. He seemed to forget completely that he was in the presence of an enemy and remembered only his state of desperate starvation. He fled away through the wood in pursuit of the buck, doubling, turning, cutting off corners of the chase, and finally settling down to that steady, dogged pace which, as every Indian knows, will at last run down a deer.

Natzoon saw him disappear among the tangled tree stems and listened to the crackle of breaking thickets which marked the direction of the hunt as it drew away toward the bluffs. Then he swung about and went back to the shore where his canoe was drawn up and where his fire was awaiting the preparation of his noontime meal. He knew well what excitement would arise should he run or paddle back to the village at the head of the rapids and there give news of the presence of the Iowa Indian in the midst of that hunting ground from which his nation had been driven. A score of braves would leap upon their horses and gallop across the open slopes of the bluff, to surround the densely-grown stretch of land at the riverside and to beat the concealing underbrush from end to end until the Iowa warrior was found and slain. He would

have, so Natzoon was certain, no single chance of escape.

"Let him go," thought Natzoon within himself. "He is only one." And a second thought came after, more vivid, but less definitely shaped in words. "He feels as I would do, and for that reason I will give him his life."

He could picture, not out of his own experience, but nevertheless quite clearly, just how the men of that banished tribe would long for their own land, for the green and plentiful hunting grounds and for the familiar presence of the wide, blue river. A certain person whom he loved much was just such an exile and talked to him often of a land of little silver lakes, of dense woodland where groups of white birch trees stood amid the green tangle of oak and poplar, and of vast forests of upstanding pine trees where the wind made thunder in the branches. He knew, therefore, just what that longing for a lost country must be, and how great could be the pain dwelling under the outer courage and stoical calm of an Indian man or woman. As Natzoon set about the cooking of his fish, as he blew upon the coals and set the willow branch in place above them, he was smiling to himself over the recent encounter and was hoping with an earnest heart that his enemy would come safe to the end of his hunting.

The river flowing past him was today its faintest blue, reflecting in its huge mirror the thin color of the empty sky. It was running low in this hot summer weather. There were certain rocks showing high and dry in the sunlight, marking the hidden

ledges over which the stream flowed so smoothly and quietly at this season. The long reefs would show more and more clearly as the summer months passed, rendering the passage through the seven miles of rapids every day more difficult. Below the chain of rapids, those purple-blue shadows which stretched out here and there in the wide expanse of water would presently come shouldering above the surface and show themselves as shelving bars of sand or gravel, making the channel for canoes and bateaux ever more crooked and intricate. The smiling Mississippi, in the late summer and early autumn, had a way of spreading herself, shallow, blue, and deceiving, over her broad river bed where rocks, shoals, and bars were only just concealed by a veil of moving waters. Only her most familiar friends could hope, at such a season, to find a safe way amongst her twisting channels.

To Natzoon, the tangled pathways of the river were as familiar as the trails leading up to his own lodge door. It was to this stretch of the stream that his tribe came every year for the midsummer hunting, after their braves had, for an earlier season, pursued buffalo and antelope on the prairie lands farther westward. Here they would fish upon the rapids or in the quieter pools of the tributary Des Moines and would shoot a few deer and buffalo upon the bluffs and amid the pastures of wild grass spreading back toward the plains country. So well established was their summer encampment, that it had been given a name—Awipatuck, the Village at the Head of the Rapids.

When autumn came, they would all go back to their winter settlement, more than a hundred miles upstream, on the long, wooded point between the clear Rock River and the Mississippi. And some day when the deer had grown too shy and the buffalo had all wandered westward, the whole tribe would move also, drifting as their fathers had drifted. From the St. Lawrence River, across the basin of the Great Lakes, along the Wisconsin River, and down the Mississippi, this wandering people had come by slow stages, stopping for a generation here, two generations there, driving out weaker tribes who held the lands before them. Very fiercely did those earlier peoples cling to their homes and do battle for them; very reluctantly did they suffer themselves to be driven forth, only after the loss of the greater proportion of their numbers. But give way they must in the face of stronger tribes, moving relentlessly always south and west, following the game.

Natzoon's eyes might even have closed in the drowsy quiet, as he waited for his noonday meal to be ready, had not his keen glance caught sight of three moving dots, far away on the surface of the river, below the rapids and just passing the longest of the hidden sand bars. He sat up quickly to watch them come steadily upstream and reveal themselves, on nearer approach, as three canoes, containing, each of them, a pair of toiling figures which labored at the bow and stern paddles. Two of the vessels, so the Indian boy could now make out, were the usual dugout craft made of cedar

trunks and called *piroques*. The third, lighter and more graceful than its comrades and riding the ripples like a duck, was of birch bark and must, therefore, come from the North country. No birch trees grew in this region, and not until a traveler attained the distant, densely wooded reaches of the river, were there to be found birch trunks great enough to fashion a canoe.

The northern forests, so different from the sparsely-wooded, open country which Natsoon knew, was the lurking place of those unrelenting enemies of his tribe, the Chippeway. With the Sioux, his people had frequent wars, varied by longer and shorter periods of peace. There was certain intercourse between the two, with some barter and exchange of goods; and there was some of that familiarity and respect which often grows up between habitual foes. The frequent clashes with the Sioux came from the fact that both lived in much the same manner, that they both hunted in similar lands, followed the same game, and counted their wealth in horses of which they were always seeking to rob each other. But the Chippeway were a different people altogether. They dwelt in the forests; they had no use for horses; they pursued both their game and their enemies in their own deadly fashion. With the Sioux and the Sac-and-Fox, those roving tribes of the open country, the Chippeway were always at war, the long war of imperishable hatreds and unforgiving blood feuds. Each of the adversaries was really in desperate fear of the other; each

had an endless list of cruelties to avenge, of marauding expeditions for which to make return.

The sight of that Chippeway canoe, breasting the current at the foot of the rapids, might have been cause for instant alarm, had it not been that Natzoon's trained observation noted the rise and dip of the paddles, wet and flashing in the sun, which were handled a little more slowly than an Indian would have handled them and with a little less skill than an Indian would have used. It was plain that these voyagers were all white men. Natzoon watched them intently, shading his eyes with his hand, until they drew almost abreast of the point. Then, deciding that they were to pass without stopping, he turned once more to the tending of his fire and his dinner.

It may be that the appetizing smell of broiled fish floated across the water and saluted the nostrils of six hungry men. Certain it is, that the birch canoe suddenly rounded to and made straight for the shore upon which the fire burned under the shade of that single, tall sycamore. It was followed by the others; and, in a moment more, all three grounded their light bows upon the sandy bank. Natzoon, all alive with curiosity within and completely unmoved and indifferent without, glanced at them carelessly over his shoulder and continued to turn his fish above the coals.

White men were not an entire novelty to him, for various traders passed up and down upon that broad, blue highway which was the only road into the wilderness. There were two also who lived near

the Awipatuck village. He had learned a smattering of French from one of them, Maurice Blondeau, the keen-eyed, quick-tongued fellow who was a trader in a small way, an interpreter when occasion demanded, and a gay adventurer in general. He was on terms of easy familiarity with many of the Indians; and, since he could sell them guns, powder, and such civilized wares, dear to the red men's hearts, he was suffered to abide peaceably in the neighborhood. Besides his native French, he could speak more than one Indian tongue, so that he was of great use to the chief Black Hawk, when it was necessary to have intercourse either with white travelers passing up and down the river or with tribes of red men other than his own. It was rumored that Black Hawk hated Blondeau, since the man knew many of his secrets and since he always seemed to be laughing a little at the dark-faced chief instead of showing proper fear of him.

The other man, Ewing, who lived on the shore of the river opposite the village, was a person less well known to Natzoon. It was vaguely understood that he was there to buy furs and also to encourage the Indians in the raising of the corn, beans, and pumpkins which the rich, waterside lands produced so abundantly. Such of these as the squaws would raise and the tribe could spare, he would buy at the end of the season. Whether he acted on behalf of some fur-trading company or had some other employer, was a question in which Ewing's red neighbors had small interest. Certainly they profited little by his attempted instructions; for they still

considered that there was no proper occupation for an Indian brave other than hunting. Of settlers in the sense of farmers or homesteaders, there was, so far, not one in all of that empty region. Such white men as had pushed into these new lands were as restless, as adventurous, and as dependent upon the spoils of the chase as were the Indians themselves.

As the newcomers came closer, Natzoon, pretending to be intent upon his fire, would have liked nothing better than to turn about and stare at them. From the first canoe, the gay birch-bark craft painted with red and blue, there disembarked a tall, ruddy-faced man with a boy of about Natzoon's own age. A certain faint resemblance announced that these two were father and son.

The elder of the two came forward at once and addressed Natzoon with a voice of harsh authority. The men in the two pirogues did not land but sat in their places, dipping their paddles from time to time that they might not drift away. Even so close to shore, the current rippled and tugged at the half-floating canoes.

"We will buy your fish," said the ruddy man. He felt in his pocket and produced a handful of glass beads.

Natzoon looked at him impassively. In spite of his uninterested expression, he was examining every detail of the newcomers' appearance and manner. They were evidently traders, but not of the number who held traffic with his tribe. The Indian trade, the bartering of knives, guns, and blankets for furs,

was extremely profitable at that period and also extremely dangerous. There were not many men who had the courage and skill in bargaining to engage in it successfully. And even amid that small number there were men of all kinds. Some were cruel and grasping, convinced that all Indians were not much better than wild animals and were to be similarly treated. Others had come to see that red men understood and demanded justice and that, if treated fairly in spite of their strange and irresponsible ways, they would hold to an honest bargain, honorably made. And there were some who ranged between the two, outwardly and rather conspicuously honest but, for all that, always ready to take advantage of the simplicity of the Indians and of their complete inexperience in the matter of buying and selling.

Natzoon had known at least one of each kind, yet scarcely more. He wondered a little to which class this loud-voiced stranger belonged, for none of these men had he ever seen before. Those who traded with the Sac-and-Fox tribe and with the southern bands of the Sioux brought their supplies from St. Louis and were well known from the Missouri north to the Chippeway River. This expedition must belong to that number who dealt with the upper Sioux and with the Chippeway, bringing their wares through the Great Lakes, by way of the Wisconsin River.

It was difficult for Natzoon not to show some of the intense curiosity which he felt concerning this boy of his own years, who had made such a long and

adventurous journey from the north to St. Louis. But, true to the ways of his people, he gave the whole group only a passing glance, which contained not the slightest show of interest, and bent himself once more to tending the fish.

The man repeated his question, but Natzoon merely shrugged his shoulders to indicate that he had not understood. The trader made another attempt, this time speaking in a butchered dialect that was meant to resemble French.

"I want to buy those fish," he said, both his tone and his color showing a mounting impatience. Then he turned to one of the men in the nearest pirogue. "Can you speak to the stupid fool in his own language, Milor?" he said in his same clumsy French.

The swarthy man sitting in the boat shook his head.

"It would be of no use, Monsieur Cloud," he answered. "These Sac-and-Fox Indians can understand the Sioux tongue, which is like their own and which I can speak. But this one here will pretend he does not comprehend, no matter what language one may use."

A white man who can talk more than one language is not averse to parading that fact with some pride. An Indian, however, will never confess, unless he must, the understanding of any tongue but his own. Natzoon, who could speak fluently two Indian languages and had some small knowledge of traders' French, did not betray, by a single change of expression, that he understood. He blew upon the coals, turned the string of fish once more,

and, since they were now done, laid them carefully upon a long strip of willow bark. Then, with the politeness of a dignified host, he offered them to the newcomers.

The man, Cloud, held out the handful of beads, but Natzoon shook his head.

"Such things are only for squaws," he declared in French.

"At least he can speak," commented Cloud to his son, pocketing the beads again. He addressed Natzoon in the same overbearing voice, "We shall want more fish than this."

"There is not even one left for him; we have taken his whole dinner," put in the trader's son.

The Indian youth had not understood the words, which were English, but he caught the meaning from the white boy's tone and the motion of his hand toward the empty bark platter. He gave the speaker a quick, shy smile and pointed to the pile of catfish which he had caught that morning and had laid in the cool shadow below the willow trees.

"Just clean a half dozen more and cook them for us," directed Cloud and added to his son in a scarcely less peremptory tone, "Help me to pull up the canoe, Malcolm."

As the whole party landed, Natzoon set himself without a word to preparing more of the fish. The laws of Indian hospitality fortunately do not depend upon the good manners of the guests. Whatever Natzoon might think of these travelers who had chanced to find him in preparation of his midday meal, since they were not avowed enemies, he could

not let them go away hungry. He was squatting beside the fire, running his knife down the backbone of the biggest fish, when some one knelt down upon the sand at his elbow. The boy Malcolm, also without speaking, got out his knife and fell to work beside him, splitting and cleaning the whole of the catch.

When the fish were ready, Natzoon having prepared three to Malcolm's one, they went together to fetch wood to replenish the fire. It was odd how quickly these two fell into ready companionship, when, with the older members of the party, Natzoon could not manage to be other than silent, suspicious, and aloof. Malcolm watched carefully as the Indian boy fed the fire, replenishing it without destroying the close-packed bed of hot coals; and he added his own dry sticks and branches in exactly the same manner.

As they were gathering fuel, Natzoon saw the white boy pick up the colored arrow which still stood half buried in the ground, where the enemy hunter had missed his aim. He watched Malcolm examine it and wished suddenly that he could tell him of that banished warrior's stealing back to his own loved hunting grounds, and of the brief and desperate moment which had followed when his return was discovered. But the boy was a stranger, and it were better not to put too much confidence in him. Therefore the short and vivid tale went untold.

The fish were broiled at last and served, hot and delicious, upon plates of curly sycamore bark. One

of the men had opened a pack and produced a store of coarse biscuit, and upon these, with the catfish, the company proceeded to dine. Malcolm offered to Natzoon a share of the biscuit, but the Indian boy declined, the dry, hard, white-man's food being not to his liking. He sat down beside the younger Cloud, in friendly comradeship, to eat his own portion of the meal. It was this feeling of dawning friendship which softened a little his reserved Indian manner and brought him to listen and even to answer the talk of the big trader, spoken in his rough-hewn French.

"You are a Reynard, is it not so?" Cloud asked, and Natzoon nodded. It was by that name that the French voyageurs had come to call the Sac-and-Fox tribe.

"And your chief, he is the famous Black Hawk? I have heard much of him all along the river and even in St. Louis."

Natzoon's face showed his pleasure at this recognition of the greatness of his leader.

"He has gone, more times than one, to St. Louis, to hold council with our Spanish Father," he said.

A grin of malicious amusement spread over the white man's face, as he continued his questioning.

"And do you Reynards understand that you will never again see or hear of that Spanish Father?"

Natzoon looked at him in bewilderment. "Is he dead, has some one slain him?" he exclaimed.

It was by the name of Spanish Father that all the Indians knew the Governor of the Province of Louisiana. Many of the Indian chiefs, including some

from the northern tribe of the Sioux, had paid him visits of ceremony and had been well received and favorably impressed. To Natzoon's mind, the end of the power of so great a chief could come about only through the hand of an enemy. Politics and diplomacy were so far beyond the understanding of the red men, that few of them even remotely understood the process by which the Spanish province of Louisiana was first ceded to the French and by Napoleon sold to the United States. All that any of them ever knew was that once they had treated with a benevolent Spanish chief, who sent them messages of goodwill, yet allowed traders to plunder them with little restraint. Then suddenly, that great man was no longer in power, and men of a different race and speech tried to explain to them that now they had another white father, who dwelt at a far greater distance, but whom they must obey even more strictly than the Spanish Governor.

Natzoon and his fellows had not even heard of this mystifying change in ownership of that country which they so firmly believed was all their own. It was the trader, Cloud, who first brought the tidings, and, like certain people who enjoy recounting unwelcome and surprising news, he made the most of what he had to tell.

"He is not slain; he has returned to his own land and has given your hunting grounds to other masters, to the Americans. And the warriors of this American Father will presently come with boats and guns and take away from you all that you possess."

There was a sound of protest from that one of the

men whom Cloud had called Milor. And, although Malcolm did not speak, his face bore a look of distress. Cloud turned upon them angrily.

"I will tell him and tell Black Hawk, also, whatever seems best to me," he declared. "There will be American traders hunting us out of the country all too soon as it is, and we have every right to block their way in any manner that we can."

Milor moved his hands and his shoulders in a gesture more French even than his rapid patter of speech.

"You are my bourgeois," he said. "It is not for me to question what you do." Bourgeois was the title which these French-Canadians gave to their employers.

The talk of the two had gone on in such quickly-spoken French that Natzoan could not follow it. And as for Malcolm, it was plain that he also did not understand fully what the two were saying. His square, honest countenance looked somewhat doubtful and troubled as he watched the changing expressions upon his father's face, but he ventured no interruption. Cloud turned once more to Natzoan.

"When the Americans come to destroy your villages and plunder your people," he said, "you are to remember this, that the British are your friends."

Natzoan regarded him in blank surprise. "American—British," he repeated, "are they not all the same people? They are the same color."

To Indians, all white men, very naturally, look much alike. With great difficulty, the tribes of the Mississippi valley had learned that a slim, olive-

skinned, black-haired trader was a Frenchman or, on rare occasion, a Spaniard, and that the bigger, broader, and more blonde strangers were English or American. Yet the two last were, in their eyes, a single people between whom they had not learned to distinguish. It was true that tales were told in their villages of a war between the English and Americans, a struggle now some twenty years past, called by an utterly incomprehensible name, for which they had no word in their own language, a Revolution. In this war, Natzoon's tribe had taken sides with the British and had been given, for their loyalty, a beautiful red and blue flag with two crosses upon it, and their chief, father of their present leader, had been presented with the big, round medal which Black Hawk now possessed. Natzoon had seen it often, hanging about the great warrior's neck, bearing the portrait of a small-featured man whose name he had heard several times but found difficult to remember, so small and short was it in comparison to the mouth-filling Indian titles. What could be made of such a name as George—George-the-Third, when given in full?

"Was he a very great brave?" he had once asked Black Hawk.

"Yes, he must have been their mightiest warrior to be so great a chief," he had been assured.

Yet the stories of the Indians' part in the war all carried a hint of disappointment and lack of satisfaction. The British warriors, it seemed, had certain foolish rules against the destruction of villages and the murder of captives, and attempted to en-

force their will upon their red allies. In the matter of taking horses and even scalps they laid down no restrictions; but it was told that more than once, after a victory, the red-coated soldiers had fought for the lives of prisoners against their red-skinned allies. It was the general opinion amongst the older braves who remembered this war, that as far as the Indians' share was concerned, it had not been so glorious as opportunity had promised. The whole matter, however, was so vague in Natzoon's mind that he could only repeat his bewilderment in a further question,

"How can an American be known from a British man?"

This seemed to Cloud so good a joke that, amid his laughter, he repeated the Indian boy's query several times. Natzoon, wincing before the white man's mirth, for an Indian cannot endure ridicule, felt a warming of the heart when he saw that the younger Cloud did not laugh.

"How could he know?" Malcolm asked. Natzoon's hurt spirit thanked him for the tone of protest, though he could not comprehend the words.

"Look at me," directed Cloud. "I am British. Look at him," indicating his son; "he is British also. You have seen few Americans, but presently you will see more, and you will observe that they are not like us nor like these Frenchmen of my company."

In his statement that he was British, Cloud drew rather heavily upon his imagination. The blood of many races had combined to give him that heavy

brow, those close-set eyes, and that mat of black hair. He was a British subject it was true, and, so far as he obeyed any laws, he observed those of the English King. Yet it is doubtful whether any good Englishman would have cared to claim his kinship. He had, however, married, somehow, a true-hearted English wife, and her son, Malcolm, was a real Briton, tall, sturdy, with fair skin and hair and an engaging and open countenance. Natzoon, being told that they were both British, felt more mystified than ever as he studied the two faces so different in spite of the faint resemblances which marked their kinship. He gave up the attempt to understand.

"You say that we will soon see Americans?" he asked.

"Very soon," returned Cloud with a certain ominous quality in his tone. "There is an expedition on its way hither, even now, a party voyaging in a great, heavy boat which sticks fast on every sand bar. I had traveled to St. Louis from my own trading country in the north, to inquire concerning these changes in ownership and just what was to come of them. I saw the expedition set out and departed myself two days afterward. We passed them in the night, where they were camped beside the stream, with a long row of fires to be seen miles away. We have heard of their adventures all along the way, for the Indians, the Kaskaskias and Cohokias, have followed and spied upon their progress for every mile and have lain about their camps every night. Yet the Americans, blundering, noisy fellows, have believed that they were passing through an empty

country and are wondering why they have seen no single red man."

"The Americans must be very brave, to pay so little heed to their enemies," Natzoon commented.

"Brave," scoffed Cloud. "Americans are cowards, every one. They will never fight you fairly; but they will seek, through fair words, to take from you all your lands and all that you value most."

Both Malcolm and the Frenchman, Milor, had been growing more and more uneasy during this talk. Milor now ventured an attempt to bring it to an end.

"Are you doing well to delay here, Monsieur Cloud, now that we have eaten and rested? We have many miles of rapids to pass before dark, and we are not any too familiar with the way."

"You are right," agreed Cloud. "And I wish to stop and have speech with Black Hawk himself as we pass the encampment. This American leader, Lieutenant Pike, is to call a council of chief men at the village above the rapids and has asked the traders to tell that message abroad." He laughed harshly. "Therefore we will spread it well for him. This boy here will tell us how to find the best channel through the rapids."

It was for the sake of Cloud's son and the Frenchman, for Malcolm and Milor, that Natzoon stood up and pointed out that intricate and crooked way which would carry them safely over the reefs. He felt a definite impulse of friendship for the boy, in contrast to the bitter and intense dislike which he had immediately formed for the trader himself.

It was for this reason that Natzoon addressed almost entirely to Milor his advice on how to follow the winding channel, a fact which the leader of the party seemed to resent. As he sat in the bow of the gay birch canoe, with Malcolm ready to push off, Cloud flung over his shoulder one last remark of purely malicious intent,

"With a little study you will soon learn to tell the difference between the British and the Americans. You will see it plainly, in time, just as I can see that you are not a plains Indian, but a Chippeway."

"What!" cried Natzoon, stung to frantic rage by such accusation. "How dare you say that to a Sac-and-Fox brave?"

"You should be flattered," drawled the white man, turning about to give him a last, ill-natured grin. "All up and down the Mississippi and in the north country, men hear tales of how much more comely are the Chippeway than any other race. And you, with your long-limbed grace and your sharp-cut nose and cheek bones, you are far handsomer than any warrior I have seen yet among the clumsy Reynards."

Natzoon, aflame with wrath, snatched up a brand from the fire and swung it about his head to launch at the man who could fling at him such an enraging taunt. Yet, at the fullest sweep of the flashing circle, he let the brand falter and drop at his side. To strike the father was to embark upon a lifelong feud with the son also. So said the Indian law, and so, he was sure, must be the rule of every race.

Cloud, whose ruddy face had paled a trifle at the sight of the Indian boy's fury, observed his hesitation and made the most of it.

"Push off, Malcolm," he ordered, with a little more haste than was quite dignified.

Malcolm, without looking back, spoke a few words to the Frenchman, then shoved the canoe into deep water and slipped adroitly into his place in the stern. He dipped his paddle and swung the light boat out into the current. Milor, before following his example, left his pirogue and strode up the beach to where stood Natzoon, the firebrand still balanced in his hand.

"He is a lynx-eyed and a harsh-tongued fellow, my bourgeois," he said, speaking slowly and carefully so that the Indian boy should be certain to understand. "But do not mind the old one. The young one bids me thank you for what you have done for us and begs that you will forget what his father has said. He is a good boy, that Malcolm; it would be a happy thing could you and he be friends some day."

He swung about, launched his heavier craft, and was off in the wake of the birch canoe, followed in turn by the second pirogue. Natzoon stood watching as they took the course which he had pointed out, passing through one chain of rapids and crossing westward at the foot of the second.

The firebrand still hung at his side, smoking and smouldering; until suddenly, with a muttered exclamation of helpless rage, he threw it into the

water, where its heat went out with an angry hiss. Of what use was it to think of taking revenge for the white man's mocking words? No one knew better than himself that they were true.

CHAPTER III

THE COUNCIL OF CHIEFS

As Natzoon launched his canoe and set forth upon his homeward way, he was still full of stinging indignation that the sharp eyes of the trader had detected what was known also to the members of his own tribe. Was there, indeed, such unmistakable evidence of his being half a Chippeway?

It was from the north country that his mother had come, years ago, when she had given her heart to a tall Fox warrior and had dared to flee with him from her father's lodge. Her young husband had been killed by the Sioux not many years later; but she had dwelt still in the Sac-and-Fox village, never questioning the idea that her growing son must be, in time, a warrior of his father's tribe. In the quiet of their lodge, in the winter evenings, she had taught Natzoon to speak the Chippeway tongue, so that, in the long and lonely years, she might at least have the comfort of hearing her own speech. She told him much of her village in the forest beside Thunder Lake and of her father, Shawonoe, one of the lesser chiefs of the Chippeway. She talked to him of the slow, careful wisdom of some of the old men and women of her people, wisdom which had been learned, she was certain, from long listening to the wind in

the pines and to the talk of the tall rushes which stood knee-deep in the clear lake water.

As Natzoon grew from a small boy to a large one, as he began to take on the height and figure of a warrior, it became clear to all eyes, even his own, that he did not resemble the tribe about him. Some of the boys with whom he had played games when he was younger and with whom he now practiced the arts of war, which every Indian youth must learn, some of these had tried the rash experiment of calling him "Forest Badger," "Pine Lynx," or even, in more foolish boldness, "Chippeway." These names, as it proved, involved them in such immediate and fierce battles with the object of their taunts, that no one of them ever dared more than a single attempt. Little by little, the habit of referring to Natzoon's northern blood had dropped into disuse. He himself would never have thought of it, had it not been that from time to time, as he sat by the campfire, he found the eyes of Black Hawk fixed long and steadily upon him, as though the chief were studying, in the changing light of the flame, just how much the boy was of his own race and just how much of an alien.

Several times Black Hawk had addressed words of harsh dislike to Natzoon's mother, which her son had resented with such hot retort that there was no love lost between the tall chief and the half-grown boy. Natzoon's sturdy shoulders and long-limbed figure gave great promise of the lithe and powerful warrior that he would some day become. It seemed that, as he watched these develop, the chief grew

willing to suffer the boy's presence in his village. For of fighting men the warlike Black Hawk had ever-growing need.

Natzoon, taught by his wise mother, came to understand a little of the character of his chief and to know that he was a combination of fierce courage, thunderous temper, and unquenchable love for his own people and for the country in which they dwelt. The home village of these people, at the mouth of the Rock River, was where a broad valley gave them grazing ground on its flat water meadows, and where the small stream split and came together again, enclosing a big island whose soil was so rich that corn, beans, and pumpkins grew there almost of themselves. In the waters of the Mississippi itself, just opposite the inflowing of the smaller river, there lay another island of very different character, rocky, heavily forested, and said to be the abode of ghosts and spirits. Only a few of the boldest hunters dared pursue game thither and then only in the greatest need. Natzoon knew, although he never would say just how, of delicate bloodroot and anemones that grew there in the spring among the crowded trees, of broods of tiny partridges which ran after their clucking mothers across the shadow-flecked glades. Above the whole stretch of green country towered a single hill, whose summit looked far abroad over both the islands, over the basin of the Rock River, over the woods and hills and wide, blue waters of the Mississippi. Black Hawk's Hill, the Indians called it; and no one of them was permitted to climb it save the chief himself. Hither

he would go for periods of solitary fasting and dreaming, seeking council, so men said, from the spirits of the wind, the thunder, and the passing clouds. But Natzoon's mother said otherwise when there was no one to hear but her son.

"He sits there on the brow of the hill and looks down at the whole green stretch of country, at the long point between the two rivers, at the village and the islands and the woods. He loves it all, every stick and stone, every silver twist of the streams, every wreath of willows at the waterside. He is thinking of how his fathers conquered this fair land, which might almost be the Happy Hunting Ground itself, took it from the Iowas and the Kaskaskias, who were not so strong as the Sac-and-Foxes. And he is wondering who will take it from him. How his heart broods over these woods and waters which are his home, how fiercely that same heart rages at the thought of any strong enemy who might, some day, drive him from this place!"

Natzoon, looking curiously at his chief as he came down the hill from his nights and days of fasting prayer, was sure that his mother had read aright that thin, ugly, rawboned face with its brooding eyes. She could very well describe to her son all the aching affection with which Black Hawk regarded this valley which was the home of his people. Did not her own heart, even after all the years, picture, in every loved detail, the fern-covered trails winding through endless vistas of tree trunks, the open, sunny marshes, bright with blue, gold, and crimson,

thick-grown with rushes and cat-tails, the clusters of pointed lodges reflected in still lake waters?

Reflection upon many matters had so occupied the absorbed mind of Natzoon on that day of his talk with the trader, that he delayed long upon the homeward way and did not reach his own lodge until late afternoon. He had no fish to show for his day upon the river; and he had very little to say as he ate his evening meal. After he had finished, however, more than one warrior paused at the tent door to discuss the news with which the whole camp was buzzing. The traders had stopped at the village and had left word that a new white chief in a big boat was ascending the river and would hold council here at Awipatuck, at the head of the rapids, with Black Hawk and with all the lesser chiefs and principal warriors of the country round about.

"I had some speech with those travelers, myself," Natzoon admitted to one of the older braves.

"The leader of the company said that he was in haste, yet he spent some time in the main lodge talking with Black Hawk," the old man told him. "They called for Blondeau to come and interpret for them, and the chief came forth later with a face like a thundercloud. I wish I could guess what the white man had been saying."

In the matter of that guess Natzoon offered him no assistance, although he himself could surmise what Cloud had said.

It was only two days later that a hunter came running down from one of the higher bluffs which

overlooked a far stretch of river and announced that the white chief's great canoe was in sight. The entire village went down to the river bank to see it come, long, clumsy, and heavy laden, struggling over the rapids with all the awkwardness of over-size and little skill in handling. Every Indian was on the shore watching, in quivering excitement, the slow approach of the laboring boat. There was much open scorn for the band of white warriors who were undertaking the difficult passage of the rapids, when it was so evident that they had not the slightest notion of how the affair should be managed.

It is easy to make a show of despising those for whom one feels a little fear. It was so most plainly in the case of the scarred warriors of Black Hawk's band, whose laughter and jeering comments grew louder and louder as the keel boat came breasting the current of the first chain of rapids. Every dip of the oars, every turn of the bow was remarked by those watchful critics upon the shore. What a great clumsy boat! What strange lading—such high-piled boxes, barrels, and bales—and what a curious and awkward method of pushing the craft forward, so unlike their own easy paddling! It was quite plain that with all these disadvantages, the strangers would soon come to grief on the sharp reefs which stretched, one after another, across the river bed. Every eye was strained, every face intent, as the red tribe watched for the white men to meet disaster.

Slowly the big boat struggled toward them, now hanging irresolute in the current, now swinging sharply round as it caught upon the lip of a limestone ledge and was seized by the thrusting hand of the river, now fighting its way free and, with a tremendous effort of the straining oars, winning a few yards in its battle with the stream. The same unspoken idea began to steal from one to another of the onlookers, the admission that determined courage will overcome even great and unfamiliar difficulties. A faint, reluctant admiration for these resolute strangers was taking form in the heart of every red warrior who stood, so silent and so hostile, watching the keel boat come. The passing wind, blowing upstream, though not with enough strength to give help in the struggle, brought a strange sound to the ears of the Indians. The big braves looked at each other in wonder, as they heard the beat and rhythm of the boatmen's voices, singing in time to the swing of the oars.

Standing among the crowd of watchers were two white men, both of them as tense, excited, and curious as were the Indians. Blondeau had come from his cabin at the mouth of a creek just below Awipatuck and was stationed at the edge of the water with his keen eyes bent upon the struggle going on below. He was laughing and joking with those near him; yet it was with a puzzled and anxious look that he surveyed the approaching boat. It seemed that he had been on an expedition up the Des Moines at the time of the passing of Cloud's party and had therefore had no speech with the

trader or even much news of what he had reported. The Frenchman thus had little more knowledge than had his neighbors of what the coming of the white men might signify.

The other man, Ewing, had crossed over from his house on the opposite shore, when he first saw the whole of the village folk gathering along the river. Natzoon was not near enough to hear what the two white men were saying, yet he understood from talk which ran through the company, that Blondeau had frankly no idea of who these newcomers could be, and that Ewing had little more, yet was trying to pretend to a great deal.

"He knows nothing of the whole matter; yet he hopes to make us believe that he is far wiser than we," said one of the warriors to Natzoon.

Presently, as they all stood clustered upon the little point of land which afforded the best view of the oncoming boat, the crowd opened and Black Hawk came striding down to the shore. He stood looking intently at the laboring strangers, who were now making definite progress toward them. His gaunt face was set in an ominous expression of anger and hostility, as he saw the boat come steadily nearer. The laughter and talk in the crowd died to silence as the whole of the company stood watching the gathering storm of their leader's displeasure.

"Shall we launch a canoe to fire on them as they get into the next reach of rapids?" asked Chichoba, the chief man of the council.

Natzoon was near enough to see the look which

passed quickly over the chief's face; anger giving place to crafty wisdom.

"No," he replied. "The Americans, I begin to hear, raise a strange tumult when one of their number has been killed, and they send more and more of their warriors to avenge his death. We will find some other way to keep these from troubling us. Yours is too simple a one, Chichoba."

The other Indian murmured in protest, "It is the easiest way—a half-dozen shots, and we are rid of them. If more of their people follow, it is not difficult to do the same, to attack them while they are struggling among the rapids and so have done with them for all time. They must all come by way of the river, and the river is our friend."

But Black Hawk would not heed his urging. "We can destroy them whenever we choose," he answered. "They are a handful, and we are many. Yet I am curious to hear what this messenger from our new American father will have to say. After we have heard him, we will decide what we shall do with him. We will launch a canoe, yes."

He beckoned to the white man, Ewing, and gave him as abrupt an order as though he were one of the tribe. "Get your boat also and drop downstream to show these strangers the channel through the rapids. If you lighten that great barge of his, there will be less trouble in passing it over the upper stretch of reefs. They have won through the worst of the way already."

Natzoon pressed forward, hoping, as he watched the chief's eye pass from one to another of the

waiting men, that he might be chosen to go among the rest. It is true that Black Hawk's glance rested upon him for a moment, moved away, and then returned and lingered. But, in the end, it was only the older braves whom he ordered to man the small fleet of canoes which presently went dancing and bobbing away across the water.

"Young men shoot too quickly," he observed shrewdly, as though he had full knowledge of the leaping impatience in the hearts of all those who were left behind.

It seemed to Natzoon that it was more difficult for him than for any of the others to wait and watch, when other men were sent to meet the enemy. Did he not know better than did all the rest, save possibly Black Hawk himself, what mortal foes were these who now approached? Every word which the trader, Cloud, had told him concerning the cowardice, perfidy, and evil intent of the Americans now ran vividly through his mind. He was certain that Black Hawk had some well-laid plan for destroying the whole party of whites, when the proper moment should come. When, he wondered, was that moment to be?

"I would rather that we beat them back in direct battle," he reflected. "The white men have come to us openly, and openly we should conquer and drive them home again."

The passing trader had planted in his heart the seed of an idea which was already taking root. Through all the years of his growing up, Natzoon had heard the older warriors tell of how the brave

and mighty Sac-and-Fox nation had taken possession of these lands along the Mississippi, with what courage they had driven forth the tribes who had held them, with what firmness they had withstood the attacks of others who would also have had this fair country for their own. And now were they themselves to flee before the coming of the whites, as the Kaskaskias had fled before them? Or were they to resist the enemy with so little success that they would vanish as a nation, with no more than a name left behind, as the Iowas had vanished? Never should that happen while they still had brave warriors to fight and a wise chief to lead them!

All these thoughts went through his mind not once but many times, as he stood watching so intently while the canoes of his people approached and met the big keel boat. After a brief parley, a part of its heavy lading was transferred to the lighter craft of Ewing and the others, and the Indians, paddling upstream once more, guided the strangers through the tangled channels of the rapids and brought them at last to shore beside the village.

Natzoon was never to forget that first sight of the man who was in command of the company of strangers. He was slighter and younger than any of the tall, broad-shouldered fellows who manned his vessel; he was dressed just as they were. His wet shirt and big boots showed plainly that he, like the rest, had waded shoulder-deep in the water to push off the boat when she had grounded on sand bars or caught upon snags. Yet there was no doubt-

ing that he was the man whose orders were obeyed by all the others and that, further, his was the leading, courageous spirit that gave energy and enthusiasm to all the company.

It happened that they came to shore not five yards from where Natzoon was standing. The young commander was sitting in the bow, intently scanning the faces of those who, as he approached, had come crowding down to the water's edge. His eyes met, for a moment, the level, unmoving gaze of Natzoon. There was a look upon his face that fairly lighted it, making it stand out with startling distinctness among the weary, sun-scorched countenances of his men. There was wonder, curiosity, and unquenchable, eager friendliness in the eyes that, for a moment, looked so squarely into the Indian boy's.

"Fool—fool," muttered Natzoon within himself. "He shows every thought and feeling in his heart and seems to care not at all who can read them. Is it so that a white warrior meets an enemy?"

It was certainly not in keeping with the custom of any red fighting man.

The newcomers disembarked and went up the beach to the council lodge, Maurice Blondeau following to act as interpreter. The talk lasted for only a brief time; for soon they all came out once more, Black Hawk and his chief warriors, with the white man and the two companions who had gone into the lodge with him. The expressions of all of them made a strange study; since there was not one who

did not look confused and bewildered. The frank cheerfulness of Zebulon Pike's face was clouded; the lowering hostility of Black Hawk's had almost broken through his outward manner of haughty dignity. Blondeau was grinning, but even he looked uneasy.

"Have you made it clear to them," Pike was saying in French to the interpreter, "that I will spend the night at Ewing's house across the river and that tomorrow I will hold council with all the chief men hereabout? We will meet on the shore yonder, where the flat, green point runs far out into the river. You are certain that they understand?"

"That much they have understood, surely, Monsieur," nodded Blondeau, "but—but not the rest."

One warrior after another, coming out of the lodge, showed varying looks of astonishment, distrust, and frank dismay. Anyone could see that the first interview had not gone well.

"If you will permit me to give a little word of advice," pursued Blondeau in an undertone but close enough to Natsoon for the boy to hear and understand the most of what he said, "I would venture to tell Monsieur that he is a shade—oh, only the merest trifle—too hasty. They are slow with strangers, these red men of the immovable faces; they think it is not becoming to a fighting man to show feeling, even if it is friendliness. Give them time, Monsieur le Lieutenant, give yourself time also. Do not seek to make friends too quickly."

Zebulon Pike gave a great sigh, as of one who had heard such advice before, but whose headlong im-

pulses made such words difficult to heed. He got into his boat without further word and was rowed away. Natzoon watched him as he sat in the stern, silent and thoughtful, his eyes looking afar across the river and the green wooded hills, as though he were pondering questions to which he did not know the answer.

The next day was clear and still with the coolness with which late summer promises the coming of autumn. From the first moment of daylight, the whole surface of the river was dotted with canoes, which swarmed back and forth between the village and the green point of meadowland stretching into the river just opposite. The little settlement of Awipatuck was alive with voices, laughter, and moving spots of color, as one after another of the tall warriors came out of his tent and strode down to the shore to take passage across the river. Many new lodges were pitched outside the usual limits of the camp, for more and more canoes had come slipping in during the night, bearing the foremost warriors and the lesser chiefs from other Sac-and-Fox settlements.

They represented, amongst them, every one of the Indian villages within three days' journey all up and down their own portion of the Mississippi and its tributaries, reaching back into the prairie country. They stood for one or two big prosperous groups of lodges, where the dwellings were made of new, bravely-painted buffalo hides or even of logs with roofs of bark, where the warriors gathered thick about the long rows of campfires, and where the

great herds of horses grazed abroad upon the meadows. They stood also for the tiny handfuls of battered wigwams, where the braves were lean and worn and few, where by the utmost courage, tireless watchfulness, and enduring struggle, it was barely possible to keep life safe from hunger, wolves, relentless storm, and equally relentless enemies. Yet every warrior, of high or low degree, had his brilliant war bonnet of painted feathers, his fringed, embroidered deerskin leggings, his necklace of beads or bears' claws, his lance, bow, or war club with dangling bright-colored ornaments. They wore the tail feathers of the golden eagle, which were, for them, as rare as diamonds and as precious. The intricate embroidery of beads or dyed porcupine quills on quivers and belts represented the long and patient needlecraft of many a toiling squaw. Many of these gorgeous trappings stood as records of long years of hunting and fighting; the materials had cost handfuls of wampum, whole strings of horses, or more than one man's life.

It was only an hour before noon that Black Hawk came out of the council lodge and stood for a moment, glancing keenly at the array of braves who were waiting to cross the river with him. The squaws, the old men, and the children had gone to the place of meeting long before; there were left only the fighting force, the erect warriors, whose muscles moved smooth as rippling water, and who wore their multicolored finery with an easy, natural pride, just as the wild birds wear their gorgeous plumage.

The lines of red and yellow paint on Black Hawk's face, the sweeping feathers of his headdress, merely served to mark more clearly his gaunt, hard ugliness. His eyes glittered as he looked about him at his following of braves. He said no word as he swung his bull's-hide shield backward over his shoulder with a mighty gesture of proud command, and walked away toward the river, the warriors following in long, varicolored lines behind him.

Natzoon should have been on the other side of the stream, jostling among the lads of his own age for a position of vantage about the meeting place, but, instead, he had lingered to the last and watched the company in their brave trappings of war come down to the water's edge. As he saw them embark, and as he set out in their wake in his own small canoe, he thought that they looked like a flock of bright-winged ducks, making their way across to the other shore.

The council was to be held on a wide stretch of smooth turf, with Ewing's house at one side and with clumps of trees surrounding it in a rough circle. Under the shade of the maples and the sycamores stood the crowd of spectators—squaws, old men, and over-young warriors who were wishing, with all their souls that day, that they were grown to man's estate and could take part in that gathering upon the green. As the company of chiefs came slowly up from the river, the crowd fairly caught its breath as they approached, for no one had realized, it seemed, how many of them there were, how gorgeous a show they made, and how grim was every

face among them. They ranged themselves in a half-moon, facing the house, and stood expectant, with the sunlight shining on bits of metal ornament, on glittering shell necklaces, on red, yellow, and scarlet feathers.

They waited for one long minute after another. The white man, it appeared, had learned one lesson from yesterday's rebuff. He was to be, today, less impulsive in his overtures toward friendly understanding. Black Hawk shifted from one foot to the other, his great black brows coming down in a heavy frown. It was not the custom for the first chief of the Sac-and-Fox tribe to wait for anyone.

The door opened, and Ewing came out first, looking small and unimpressive in the face of that brilliant company. Maurice Blondeau followed, grinning more broadly than ever. It might even have been by his advice that the moments of waiting had passed. Then, finally, came Zebulon Pike, erect, very grave, stepping through the dark, narrow door into the sunlight. He was in his full dress uniform of blue and gold, his cocked hat, with its falling white feathers, held across his breast. His swinging, burnished sword glittered in the sun, as he came slowly across the green.

There had been chattering talk among the on-lookers; but the voices dropped to a sudden hush of silence, as the white man advanced toward that half circle of tall warriors standing as immovable and as mute as bronze statues. He was but one, and the magnificent, waiting chiefs were very many;

but there was a dignity and power in his youthful presence which made him equal to them all.

Natzoon, breathlessly silent like the rest, felt a tremor of excitement go through him as he watched the stranger come forward.

"All white men are weaklings compared with our race," he assured himself, over and over. And had not Cloud told him that Americans were the poorest and weakest of them all? This man with his proud bearing and his grave, earnest look was impressive for a moment, but to a second glance he showed himself to be made of no such stern stuff as the red warriors. It was still possible to read upon his face all of his thoughts and feelings. That earlier warmth of heart was only half hidden under his present sober dignity, and was ready and anxious to leap forth at the first word of genuine welcoming. There was no child in the whole village who was not a better master of himself, scoffed Natzoon. That such a man should pretend to be a warrior!

Lieutenant Pike waited as though he hoped that some one in all that company would offer him a word of greeting. But, since no one spoke, he turned to Blondeau and proceeded, through him, to address the assembled council.

"Your great father, the President of the United States, wishes to understand better the ways, needs, and desires of his Indian children. He has ordered his war chief to send a number of his young warriors in different directions to take the red men by the hand, and to ask and answer such questions as might lead to better knowledge among them all."

There was a pause, for now was indeed the moment for Black Hawk or some other chief to step forward and make some formal sign of welcome. Yet no one moved and Blondeau, in an undertone, advised Pike to continue.

He had more to tell of the message of earnest goodwill which he, a young brave, was carrying from his great chieftain. It was spoken with a genuine and simple eloquence which it was impossible to doubt. His expressive face lit as he talked; it seemed to speak directly to that silent audience, although his actual words must come through another. He looked about, as he spoke, at each warrior in turn, at the women and the old men under the trees, as though he were seeking, anywhere, a sign that he was heeded and understood. Yet upon no face was there a smile, not even the movement of a muscle to change the expression of those red, masklike faces all staring at him together.

He spoke of the plan of the United States Government to establish trading posts which should supply the Indians with guns, powder, and grain, in return for their furs. These would manage the affairs of sale and purchase more honestly than did casual voyageurs, who passed here and there amongst them and were just or unjust according to the character of the man. Would this place, at the head of the rapids, at this village of Awipatuck—he made a brave effort at pronouncing the name and was assisted by Blondeau—would Awipatuck be a proper situation for such an establishment?

Black Hawk, with brief coldness, answered at last. This spot would suit them less well than the place of their main village at the Rock River. He might tell his father, the President, that the Sac-and-Fox nation would allow the trading post to be set up there, if there was sure to be a good supply of blankets, guns, and knives.

"And rum," prompted an old chief who stood near, but Black Hawk shook his head impatiently. There was no need to treat of that; wherever traders were, there, also, was always rum.

Again there was a pause, for now it was plainly the turn of the Indians to take some share in the effort toward better acquaintance. But still there was no move or sign other than Black Hawk's ungracious speech, and the whole gathering stood silent, hostile, and unresponsive. A curious, steel-blue color lit the Lieutenant's eyes, and his face changed as he spoke further.

"Having told you what your great father wishes to do for you, I will now show what he requires that you should do for him."

He added certain words to Blondeau, which made the interpreter swing about and look at the young officer in dismay.

"You would never say that," he exclaimed in French.

"I must say it," returned Pike relentlessly. "It is part of my business with these men."

"It is best to let such matters lie quiet," said Blondeau, but he turned about to the assembled warriors and repeated with slow reluctance,

"I am ordered to tell you that this officer has heard, as he came up the river, news of a white man who was slain by an Indian near Hurricane Island. He was told that the man who did this deed was of this tribe. He demands that you produce the murderer for punishment."

A ripple of astonished murmuring went through the crowd under the trees, while even one or two of the warriors looked at each other in open astonishment. All eyes turned to Black Hawk, whose face grew darker, but who answered with his same unbroken and insolent calm.

"We have heard of that death. The Indian was not of our nation, he was of the cowardly tribe whom our fathers drove from these lands. It was not one of the Sac-and-Foxes who did that deed, although there was no doubt that the white man deserved death."

A quick flush colored the Lieutenant's face, an anger very different from the black shadow of cold rage which lay across the Indian's face.

"We will look into that matter later," said Pike. "It is true that there was some rumor that the murderer was not of your people, as well as some talk saying that he was. You are to understand that the President and his chief will from this time hold to account all Indians who slay white men; and with the force of equal justice he will smite all white men who lay their hands upon Indians."

Black Hawk took a step forward; his stern calm suddenly vanished, his whole aspect changed.

"Is that true?" he cried. "I demand that you tell me, is that really true."

Blondeau spoke briefly with Pike.

"He says," the interpreter translated, "that it is true, he swears it upon his own honor. He bids you tell him what grievance you have, for which you ask that justice be done."

The tall chief looked desperately about, from his array of warriors to the crowded watchers at the edge of the circle. His copper-hued face went back to its old, unyielding look.

"I have no grievance," he returned slowly. "I was merely astonished at the white man's words. Has he more to tell us of the messages of our new white father?"

There was another matter. It had been reported that British traders had given flags and medals to all the Indian chiefs of the upper Mississippi, thus binding them to alliance with the King of England. They were to give up those flags and medals now, since they owed loyalty to only one government, that of the United States.

Black Hawk conferred with two of the chiefs near him and allowed one of them to speak the answer which he evidently had suggested.

"We will not give up our medals," this man declared. "It is true that our new father is the President of the United States, but what does that matter? We like to have two fathers."

Zebulon Pike smiled in spite of himself, since the real meaning of his request seemed to be so thor-

oughly misunderstood, and forbore to press the demand.

There was a little more talk of traders' licenses and other affairs which Natzoon could not well comprehend. The boy was, moreover, lost in wonder over Black Hawk's having dropped his self-command for that one quivering moment. There seemed to be some unexpected power in the white man's words. The boy's attention, however, came back quickly when Lieutenant Pike took up the next subject of his speech. He spoke a word at which Natzoon started; for it was the name of the Chippeways.

"It is my wish," he was saying through Blondeau, "not only that the white men should be at peace with the Indians, but that the red men themselves should learn to live together without warfare. The Sac-and-Foxes, the Sioux, the Chippeways, can they not cease shedding one another's blood? I have greatly desired that some young man from your nation should go with me in my boat to talk with his own people and, later, with the warriors of the Sioux and the Chippeways, to tell them that this is your wish as well as mine, to have peace all up and down the great river. When I return to St. Louis at the end of my journey, I hope that there will go with me one from each nation, Chippeways, Sioux, Menominees, Reynards, to tell the white chieftain that this great peace is accomplished."

He stepped back, having evidently concluded what he wished to say, and made a sign to one of his sergeants who had come after him out of Ewing's

house. The man opened a bag which he carried and spread out a generous array of knives, packages of tobacco, small bags of salt, and of red coloring. Black Hawk came forward and stooped to inspect them. He took up the largest knife, unsheathed it, and stood weighing it in his hand. On a willow tree at the edge of the circle, a broad section of bark had been cut away for a blaze, leaving a ragged white mark. The chief suddenly raised the knife and launched it, with swift and certain aim, at the target on the willow trunk, in whose exact center it stuck and stood quivering.

"A skillful hand merits a good knife," Lieutenant Pike said to him. "The weapon is yours, a gift from your white father."

Natzoon, at a sign from Black Hawk, plucked out the knife and brought it back to the chief, who thrust it under his blanket without a word. Other warriors came forward and received their presents of tobacco, salt, and vermilion, some taking them with open, almost childlike delight, some attempting to copy the stiff reserve of their leader. When the last gifts had been distributed and the sergeant had walked away with the empty bags, Black Hawk abruptly lifted his voice, and the whole assembly stood still to listen in silence.

"You have come to us, unasked, from a great distance," he said to Pike. "You have brought us gifts, and you have made us promises. We thank you for them all." There was a mocking note under his ceremonious words, which robbed them of any hint of real gratitude. "And," he added, his

voice taking on an edge like that of the knife beneath his blanket, "you have accused us of harboring murderers amongst us. Have you anything more that you would like to say before this council comes to an end?"

Natzoon saw the officer look about him. His own soldiers stood beside Ewing's cabin, a meagre handful in the midst of a crowd of spectators, whose men alone outnumbered them twenty to one. Even these were some distance away, while their commander stood alone in the centre of a group of at least fifty tall braves, selected fighting men, the flower of the tribe's army of warriors. One sign from Black Hawk, the mere lifting of his hand, could have put an end to the expedition forever, with no single white man left to carry back the tale of what had happened. If Black Hawk knew this, so, equally well, did Zebulon Pike. Although this minute might well be his last, he faced his tall adversary squarely, with a look that was clear challenge in the face of the other's sullen defiance.

"I have one thing more to say," Pike declared; "it is only this—that whatever may be the results of our meeting, I am proud to be the man chosen to bear this message to you. And now I declare this council to be concluded."

It was Black Hawk who plainly had meant to put an end to the council of his chiefs; yet he found himself suddenly dismissed on his own part among the rest. Lieutenant Pike turned about and walked back toward Ewing's house, paying no further attention to the unfriendly chieftain. Black Hawk

took one step after him; then stood still, unwilling to sacrifice his dignity by following. He beckoned to Blondeau and gave him an order.

"Tell that one yonder"—an Indian has a curious prejudice against speaking any man's real name—"tell him that I have not yet made a decision in the matter of sending a young man with him upon his forward journey. Tell him that he must wait until tomorrow, if I am to choose one out."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. "It is my business to tell one what the other says," he observed. "Let it be known that I claim no share in the words which pass by my means from him to you and back again. But it would be hard to tell which of you has spoken, this day, with a more unwise tongue."

He went toward the house to repeat the message, which Lieutenant Pike heard as he stopped for a moment at the door. If he took heed of the insolence of the words, he did not show it by any reply or even by looking back, for he stepped within and closed the door behind him. There was nothing left for Black Hawk to do but to turn upon his heel and walk away to his canoe.

That evening Natzoon had lain down to sleep within his lodge, his mind still so full of excitement and wonder that sleep seemed driven far away. All of the Indians in the village had seen that the white man paid no attention to Black Hawk's last speech, bidding him wait until the morrow. The party had delayed a few hours longer; but well before sunset they had launched their boat and had set forth

again, evidently marking the promise of a clear, moonlight night and intending to put some further miles of their journey behind them before they slept. Natzoon, as well as many others, felt certain that this was full proof of that cowardice which, so the trader, Cloud, had told them, was to be expected of all Americans.

The boy wondered a little that the wise and crafty Black Hawk had suffered the white men to depart with no further words; he was surprised, indeed, that the hostile chieftain had permitted them to go at all. There was no use in his thinking of slumber as he puzzled over this question. A relentless procession of ideas was going through his mind, which finally banished sleep entirely.

The Americans were no mean enemies, that he could see in spite of what Cloud had said. And were these new people to make themselves masters of the Mississippi lands; were they to drive the Sac-and-Fox from their loved homes and their hunting grounds as they themselves had driven others? And would there be justice in that disaster to his tribe who had been cruel conquerors in their own day?

As he pondered long and wakefully over all these matters, there grew up within him, almost against his own wishes, a strange idea. Suppose the whole nation should be saved from its great peril by the courage of one brave! The old tales told about the campfire often related how a single warrior had averted some dreadful danger which threatened the entire tribe. Suppose that this war-

rior were not even full-grown; suppose it were he, Natzoon, the half-Chippeway, against whom all the others bore an unforgetting grudge on account of his alien blood! And if it were to be himself how—how was the task to be accomplished?

He had got to this point in his reflections and could, apparently, win no further, when he heard a summoning voice outside the lodge door. He slipped outside and saw the whole encampment lying in the sharp black-and-white of a brilliant moonlight night, with one tall figure standing before his dwelling and casting a long shadow up to the very door. It was Chichoba, the warrior next in power and authority to Black Hawk, a low-browed, broad-shouldered brave known for great strength and for his slowly thought-out, crafty counsels. He, more than all the other warriors, had seemed to dislike Natzoon for the fact of his not being entirely one with them. But that dislike he appeared, for the moment, to have forgotten.

"Would you like," he said, "to give aid in saving your tribe from the great danger which threatens it?"

"Yes," responded Natzoon with all his heart.

So another had been thinking of that same desperate need, and another had actually found the way.

"You and I are to take my canoe and follow the white men," directed Chichoba. "No, do not go back to your lodge. I have laid weapons in the boat and dried meat for a journey. Old Nigola will explain, tomorrow, to your mother and to my kinsmen

just what I see fit that they should know. But you and I must set forth without one moment of dallying."

"Does Black Hawk bid us go?" Natzoon wished to know, still wondering and bewildered.

Chichoba gave a low, harsh laugh.

"Black Hawk counsels caution; it is the first time in all my life that I have seen him have misgiving. He says that if we slay one white man, a swarm of others will come later and that they are in numbers like the stars in the sky. He has set out in his own canoe and has passed the big boat by now; he has gone to watch and fast upon his sacred hill, and to ask aid and wisdom from the gods. But I, Chichoba, have not waited to ask the gods; I have a swift and certain plan for saving us all."

"And I—what am I to do?" asked Natzoon.

"That shall be made plain to you later. It will be a glorious deed which we shall do. You—you, and none other, are the proper one to share it with me."

CHAPTER IV

WHITE MAN'S MAGIC

The moon was high and clear above the river, as Natzoon and his companion set forth. Chichoba swung the canoe to head upstream, and the boy, dipping his paddle with steady, silent strokes, drove it into the current. After a mile of silent voyaging, Natzoon ventured a question which, in his burning curiosity, he could not keep to himself.

"Shall we meet with the white men soon?"

"No," was Chichoba's grunted reply. "We will follow until they reach the rapids at the mouth of the Rock River, near our winter village." He paused, then added with another of his brief harsh laughs, "We must even abide each other's company just that far."

He was making no attempt to conceal his hatred, an enmity which, for some reason, must have been the very basis for his choosing the boy as his companion. Whatever was his plan, he evidently had no intention, for the present, of sharing it with Natzoon. When the boy seemed about to speak again he ordered sourly,

"Ask me no further questions, for I will answer none of them."

No more words were exchanged, and the little boat sped on her way as soundlessly as did the ripples which crinkled under her bow.

Beneath the moon, the smooth floor of the river seemed to be paved with silver, although, in the wake of the canoe, the level brightness was broken into a shifting pattern of quivering light. The tree-lined shore cast a black border of shadow all along the line of the bank, a shadow whose edges rocked and wavered as the little waves followed one another outward from the speeding boat and carried their spent force to the shelving land. An owl hooted softly among the willows, and a great flock of black birds, roosting in a big maple tree close to the water, awoke with an abrupt chattering of alarm and a soft thunder of mounting wings.

Mile after mile passed with no words exchanged. Yet Natzoon, as he bent his mind to the solving of the mystery of Chichoba's journey, became more and more conscious of one single thing, the sullen hostility of the man behind him. When, finally, he turned his head to ask for some direction concerning the guiding of the boat, Chichoba bade him be still, in a voice of such open hostility that the very tone carried with it a sharp threat of danger. They were ill-assorted companions indeed, to be setting forth upon this unexplained journey, the object of which must surely be the destruction of the white men, but one of the details of which might easily be destruction to Natzoon himself. If Chichoba needed his help, then he was safe at least until they came to where the white men were. Yet even if he must perish with them, he was willing to go. He would be serving his tribe, and that was all that he asked. A tingle of excitement ran through him, as

he thought that he was about to do battle against the foes of his father's people. He was determined to acquit himself well. Yet he had a strange, crawling sensation along the muscles of his back, as he thought of that coiled hatred lurking behind him. He felt, quite surely, that a moment was to come when he would stand alone against white courage and red treachery. Where could he then look for aid? Would the river help him?

Natzoon believed, as did all his people, that this still, sleeping world about him was peopled everywhere with spirits, the watching souls of trees and hills, the hostile or friendly demons of winds and clouds, and the great and powerful master of them all, the river. The woodland gods of rivulet and forest were of no great power, so most of the Indians thought, and could easily be persuaded or tricked by any adroit medicine man. But the great river, whose enormous strength lay hidden beneath those smoothly flowing waters—ah, that was a being very different! Medicine men might chant and pray and fast upon its banks, might dance their most sacred dances and cast their most potent charms into the current, without effect. The river, when it pleased, would rise in a vast, muddy flood to drown the low-lying woodlands, and back up into the smaller, quieter streams. Or it might shrink to treacherous, blue shallows, where canoes were caught on the sharp rocks and where the merciless current capsized and crushed the lightly-made vessels and carried their occupants whirling to destruction. Natzoon, as his arms moved steadily to the

lifting and dipping of the paddle, was drifting into a waking dream, wondering whether, as the medicine men all said, the river was a real and living creature and was the friend of the red men and foe of the white.

If it were friendly, why had it covered the low meadows last spring, just when the horses were almost famished after the long, cold winter and when the hunters, in little better plight, had counted so certainly upon a rich harvest of ducks and geese along the willowy margins of the stream? Prayers and gifts and long sacred chants had wrought no effect. Even while the medicine men, decked out in all their most gorgeous robes, had stood singing upon the banks, the chilly waters had come up and up, catching first at their feet and then at their knees, until they fell back in despair and the whole tribe went hungry for two more moons. And yet, as Natzoon and Chichoba felt their practiced way along the twisting channel, they were carried upward by this eddy and that, and were able to find gentle waters close to one bank or the other, in spite of the harsh current which had resisted, with such determination, the progress of the white men. The river might be deaf to their prayers, might show only fitful kindness to these red men who had lived for generations upon its banks; but surely, surely it was still to help them in their coming struggle with the hated enemy. He listened, holding his breath, that he might the better hear the deep voice of the flowing stream. No giant can move without a sound, not even a smooth river, still and calm under

the white moon but nevertheless rolling out a vast low sound of endlessly stirring waters.

What was it saying? The medicine men would have vowed that they could interpret that wordless message; perhaps even Black Hawk, wise in all Indian lore, could hearken and understand. But Nat-zoon, no matter how long he listened, no matter how he let his spirit drift with the softly moving winds and the relentlessly moving waters, could not guess what the river was telling him.

Of a sudden he felt the canoe swing about, steered by Chichoba's powerful paddle. He jerked himself out of his waking dream, instantly alert to discover the reason of their change of course. They were skirting the shore and had just passed a low point of land, where his companion, instead of sending them forward into the open water, had drawn their boat deep into the shadow of overhanging trees. Just ahead of them three dully-glowing heaps of coals showed where as many campfires had burned down.

The hour of the night was now so late that the sky toward the east had turned from black to gray, and by this ghost of the coming morning light, it was possible to make out the white men lying rolled up in their blankets, all about the spent fires. Evidently they had traveled late and intended to set forth again at dawn, for the encampment was hastily and clumsily made, as though by weary and sleepy hands. The whole number seemed wrapped in sleep, even the single sentry sat nodding upon a log, his gun dropping from his hand. Yet, as the canoe moved noiselessly past the grassy stretch of

the shore, the two within it saw that one man, at least, in that company was awake.

Zebulon Pike was sitting beside the third fire, his elbow on his knee and his chin on his hand, looking out at the river. Perhaps he had awakened before the rest, or perhaps he had not slept for thinking over the day just passed. He was lost in deep and troubled thought as he sat there, his clean-cut face showing against the faint, red light of the coals, his hair ruffled by the freshening morning wind. Was he, too, listening to the voice of the river, straining his ears to hear what it was saying and wondering whether the message was for good or ill?

He got up, as though too restless to sit quiet any longer, and paced up and down in an open space between the trees, his face still turned toward the broad, ghostly expanse of water, gray in the dimness of the failing night. Natzoon's eyes followed every move as the white man walked away between the water and the willows, wheeled, and came back again.

"He does not even look behind him," the boy thought in scornful wonder. He could hardly believe that any man would be so ignorant of danger or so indifferent to it, that he would not look in all directions for lurking perils.

The silent canoe stole nearer, and, held by the easy motion of a soundless paddle, hung against the current almost opposite the second fire. Natzoon waited, curious to know what next move Chichoba would make, and finally twisted about in his place and looked over his shoulder at his companion. The

moon had dropped out of sight, leaving the whole world dim after its earlier silvery brightness, so that even to Natzoon's eyes the figure behind him was only a dark shadow. Of a sudden, however, some long-burning log at the bottom of the fire broke apart and flared into bright flame for the space of a second. The sentry started and awoke. Zebulon Pike swung about, calling,

"Who goes there?"

Natzoon felt the canoe dropping back, caught by the current and no longer held against it. A black pool of shadow covered them completely, so that they were still hidden, even when the Lieutenant sought to stir the fire into a new blaze.

"What was that we saw?" he was asking the sentinel with sharp insistence.

The Indian boy could not understand his words, but he could guess their purport, as well as he could gather from the voice and gesture of the sentry that he was declaring that no one had come near and was stoutly denying that he had been asleep. Other men, hastily aroused, came stumbling down to the edge of the water; but, by this time, the canoe had dropped behind the point and was out of sight. To Natzoon, that brief moment had brought such startled surprise, that he had almost betrayed their presence by an exclamation. It was not the sight of that company on shore, but Chichoba's face, lit by that brief flame, which had so astonished him. It had a look of hungry hatred, of some fierce and clutching desire to take the lives of those whom he was watching.

Once, in the early spring of that same year, when Natzoon and Chichoba chanced to be hunting together, as an older and a younger warrior were often accustomed to do, the two had lain waiting for game behind a fallen log. A big black bear, lean and fierce after its winter sleep, had come padding and snuffing across the glade before them. Meat had been scarce in the camp, and the hunting had been bad, owing to the floods. The shuffling bear, thin as it was, represented a valuable store of provision for the famished village. Yet to attack such an animal was no small venture, since it was far stronger than they and quite as hungry. As the two waited for the big beast's shambling progress to bring it within reach, Natzoon observed that his own position offered him the nearer and better shot. He glanced up at his companion for permission to fire first and caught upon Chichoba's face the true look of the savage hunter, the tense, merciless purpose with which he marks down his prey, when the wild beast in the man leaps out to fall upon the wild beast of the forest.

Indians vary; some are a little nearer to the animal which is still part of man's nature; some are closer to the spirit which has fashioned human-kind in the image of God. Natzoon was of those who looked upon hunting as a daily task, something of a game, whose prize was sufficient food, and whose penalty for the loser was hunger or perhaps death. He had felt, more than once, a pang of pity for some lithe, wild creature lying limp upon the grass or the snow, never to leap or run again. He called

such a feeling cowardly weakness; and he would not have admitted it to any person. Yet he had never known any such sensation as he read that day in Chichoba's face, when that wild passion for killing takes possession of the Indian hunter and makes him a fiercer creature than the one which he desires to slay.

Perhaps Chichoba, in spite of his carefully laid plans, might have been unable to hold back from falling upon his unconscious prey then and there. As it was, he was forced to abandon his desire on the sudden taking alarm of the sleepy sentry, and was obliged to lie in shadow behind the point, while the sky grew paler and whiter and while the men's voices, sounding across the water, told the two in the canoe that the company was making ready to move.

Not until the keel boat had come rowing out from the little bay where it had been moored, not until the party had bent to the oars and sent it well away upstream, did the canoe set out again upon its own voyage. This time it moved cautiously, nosing forward close to the bank, keeping always one turn behind in the course of the twisting river, always waiting until a bend of the stream had carried the white voyagers out of sight, before it continued on its pursuing way. All day long the two boats journeyed thus, the one, big, clumsy, and blind, forging upward against the current as best it could, the other, small, furtive, and hidden, stealing easily along in the other's wake.

For day after day the curious journey continued, with incidents of varying character. There were

times when the big boat could not go forward save by poling or towing, with all the men wading knee-deep under the willows; and there were times when it caught, immovable, upon a sand bar or clutching snag under the water. Then the two Indians would land upon some low point of land and lie hidden among the bushes, watching the efforts of the white crew to free their vessel. Often the task would last for half a day or more, the men working up to their waists or armpits in swift running water, the leader toiling as valiantly as any of the rest. Natzoon would finally grow restless and wish that they might go on rather than wait and watch through every hour of the white men's delay. But Chichoba would be observing exultantly every effort of the tired, struggling voyagers, who blundered for hours over a task which, at a word of direction from him or Natzoon, who knew the channel, could often have been accomplished in a few minutes.

"Are we never going to pass them? Are we never going to face them in open combat?" Natzoon would ask now and again. But his companion answered always with an impatient frown and with the brief words,

"Not yet. Only at the proper time."

At last Natzoon grew too weary of the long waits to endure them unbroken, and fell into the way of roving off among the thickets, unforbidden by Chichoba and perhaps even unnoticed, so intent was the older warrior upon the discomfiture of their enemies. Sometimes, when the boat was being slowly poled or towed up an open stretch of river, the Lieutenant

or certain of his men would also go ashore and range the woods for game, overtaking their vessel later with such spoils of the chase as made a welcome addition to their meagre diet of salt meat and biscuit. There were several times when Natzoon came near to meeting Zebulon Pike face to face in the willow and hazel brush, and only by the silent swiftness, which is a part of every Indian's training, managed to slip out of the way before the white man could catch sight of him.

One breathless afternoon, as Natzoon was sitting beside one of the small tributary streams which ran steeply down the bluff into the Mississippi, the black spaniel came bursting through the bushes looking wildly about for its master. The little creature was running with tongue lolling out; it was hot and gasping for breath and was so spent, that, at a word of kindness from the Indian boy, it threw itself down upon the grass beside him and lay panting. Natzoon passed a hand over its silky coat and thought how different it was from the rough-haired, wolfish animals which hurried snarling and quarrelling about his village. The spaniel wagged its brief tail appreciatively and dropped its chin upon the boy's knee, although all the time, with anxiously alert eyes and nose, it was scanning the thick underbrush and sniffing for a chance clue to its master's whereabouts. Natzoon stroked the smooth head and curly ears and watched the visible beating of the dog's heart, as the small animal lay upon the green bank beside him. They seemed drawn to each other, these two utter strangers, and

were able to hold that friendly converse between boy and dog which requires no interpreter. Yet, at the end of half an hour, when there sounded through the wood the faint note of a far-off whistle, little black Pluto jumped up without ceremony and went dashing away through the underbrush with never a backward look. There was dry bitterness in Natzoon's heart as he observed the haste with which the white man's dog would desert his new-made Indian friend

Two days later they were nearing the region of the winter village, being not many miles from the valley of the Rock River. Natzoon was walking through the forest on an afternoon hotter and more oppressive than any he had known throughout the summer.

"It is the last of the August moon," he was saying to himself, "and that should mean that this blanket of heat should soon lift a little."

The sky was cloudless, where he could see it in patches above the trees, yet, none the less, he knew by the heavy feeling of the air that a storm was approaching. A fitful wind went rustling through the tangled woods, blowing the noisy poplar leaves with a sound as of rain already falling, then dying away to leave the air heavier and hotter than before. From time to time, where an open glade gave upon the river, he caught glimpses of the boat, caught for at least the tenth time on a shallow bar which had been hidden beneath the blue surface with all the cunning which the Mississippi knew.

"The river is giving us all the aid it can; it is the friend of the Indian still," he thought happily. He gave hardly a thought to Chichoba, who was making leisurely progress with the canoe, observing, with scorn and satisfaction, the heavy labors of the white men.

Natzoon was wondering whether the little dog would come ashore again, wishing, for some reason which he could not explain to himself, that his hand might once more feel the silken softness of that black, curly coat. He wandered aimlessly about at the point of land nearest the boat and presently saw, to his delight, that the commander of the party was splashing through the shallow water toward the land, with small black Pluto sometimes wading, sometimes swimming, behind him. The Lieutenant struck away toward the bluffs beyond the heavy, wet bottom lands, evidently intent, in spite of the long tramp in the heat, upon providing his party with fresh meat for their next meal. He passed, quite unconscious of any presence save his own, so close to the hidden boy that Natzoon could have reached out and touched the edge of his fringed shirt. Pluto stopped and sniffed, his stump of a tail moving vaguely, as though he realized that a friend was near and regretted that he must today be about his business and could not stop for friendly talk. The two went rustling away and disappeared, the Lieutenant seeming to wade waist deep in the soft green of the vines and bushes as he trudged off toward the hills. Natzoon made a move to follow them, but, lazy with the heat, flung himself

down, instead, beside the water and watched the slow efforts of the boatmen to disengage their vessel.

A broad-shouldered fellow, evidently the second in command, was knee-deep in the water, giving orders to the men who pushed, pulled, and struggled along the sides of the boat, dragging her, inch by inch, toward the deeper water. Now and again they would all stop to rest and talk for a little, before they bent themselves to new toil.

"They do not even know that a storm is coming," thought Natzoon, as he watched their leisurely effort, and as he felt the ominously hot wind touch his cheek.

Two of the men were openly shirking, in spite of the loud orders of the burly sergeant. They hung back when it was time to push, and edged away from the others when the command was given for all to pull together. At last they both slipped quietly away into the shallow water at the crest of the bar and made their way toward the shore. The big sergeant roared a wrathful order to them to come back, but they paid no heed, and, since the boat at that moment lurched and slid sideways at a dangerous angle, he was unable to give them further attention or to enforce their return. The two came clambering up the bank, as close to Natzoon as the Lieutenant had passed, and went off through the dense wood.

"The leader went crashing through the forest like a wounded elk, but these two trample like a herd

of buffalo," was Natzoon's comment, as he saw them go.

He sat for some time watching the men at work, as they shouted and struggled, laughed and rested, and then set to their task again. Once in every few minutes, his keen eyes took a quick glance all up and down the quiet shore and made note of the gently-stirring object behind a jutting stump, which might have been a wading water bird, but which Natzoon knew to be Chichoba's canoe lying in an eddy of the current.

"Why has he come so close?" he wondered, for this was nearer than the smaller boat had ever come before.

He saw, also, a mounting bank of clouds rising above the western bluff, bringing, at last, the rain which the breathless heat had promised. The men worked on, unconscious of either the storm or of nearby watching eyes. As is often the case when rain is near, the sound of voices carried across the water with extraordinary clearness, so that they might have been talking close to Natzoon's elbow, rather than with many yards of smooth river running between them. He could easily gather, from their tone and laughter, that they were joking one another good-naturedly, and were toiling with the best of goodwill and good spirits, at their hot and weary task.

There was a jerk and a splash, and the boat slid off the bar and plunged into deep water amid the cheers of her crew. At almost the same moment, a long roll of thunder called the attention of all that

company, both afloat and ashore, to the fact that the storm was upon them. The sky darkened above the western bluffs with great streaks of lightning zigzagging across the gray-black clouds. The soft, fitful wind suddenly raised its voice to a furious roar, as it came driving through the wood, lashing the elms and sycamores, bending the pliant willows until their branches dipped into the water or swept the ground. Natzoon jumped to his feet suddenly, thinking that he and Chichoba had been discovered; for the big sergeant had stood up in the bow of the boat to fire a gun.

A moment later, however, the boy realized that the loud report was merely a signal to call home the Lieutenant and the two men who had shirked their share of the task. The sergeant had set off his piece straight into the air and had followed the summoning report with another and another. The last one was completely lost in the tremendous clap of thunder which seemed to split the sky at the same moment.

Even Natzoon, long used to the deafening noise and the blinding flashes of violent storms, was stunned by the gigantic crack of the thunderbolt, which had evidently struck somewhere close by in the wood. He listened a moment and heard a shattering crash, as the tree, which had been rent asunder, came plunging to the ground. Immediately afterward, borne on the hurrying wind, came the tiny, frantic yelp of a small dog in desperate distress.

He ran, sure-footed among the roots and slippery mosses, and came to where a great sycamore, torn and stripped of its bark from tip to root, had fallen prone. Caught under one of the upper branches was the struggling form of Zebulon Pike's little spaniel. Natzoon knelt upon the ground, wrenched the stiff bough aside, and gathered up the little dog. The fork of the branch had pinned him down without injury other than a cut hind leg and a probable store of bruises. As the boy took him up to examine his hurts, the spaniel, trembling and whimpering, nestled against his shoulder and licked his cheek with a warm, pink tongue. Natzoon held him for a moment, looking down into those brown eyes which looked up at him with such sure confidence. A curious, warm feeling ran through him, to which he could not give a name. He did not know that it was friendship, the first real friendship which he had ever known. Silent, reserved, and living for all his life among people of a race not really his, he had passed all of his fifteen years without ever owning a real friend.

The rain was falling now in torrents. Through it Natzoon could see the Lieutenant hastening through the wood toward the river, could hear him calling as he went, "Pluto, Pluto."

The little dog pricked up his ears, whined when Natzoon sought to keep him, then began to fight frantically, as the boy's strong hands held him fast. With a sharp twist of his hurt body, which cost him a loud cry of pain, the spaniel wrenched himself

free and ran wildly through the blinding rain to seek his master.

"Go, you little beast," muttered Natzoon furiously. "Would you rather belong to a stumbling, clumsy white man, than to a real warrior?"

Pluto could still be heard amongst the trees, his voice raised in loud barks of joy that he had found his beloved owner.

The big boat had swung inshore, to take aboard Lieutenant Pike, who now stood plainly in sight upon the bank. Yet the firing of guns continued, to summon the truant members of the crew who were still out of sight in the forest. Finally Natzoon's quick ear caught, while still afar, the noisy stir of their progress, as they came running in wild anxiety to rejoin the comrades whom they had deserted. Yet someone else, it seemed, had also heard them coming.

They had reached a narrow, open glade which led down to the water, with the big boat visible through an opening between two poplars. With an exclamation of delighted relief, the two quickened their pace, then suddenly stopped dead, for across the glade strode Chichoba, tall, leisurely, and of imposing appearance, with the colored feathers in his hair and his fringed leggins blown by the wind and with his gun slung across his shoulders. He seemed quite unconscious of the two strangers who stood gaping at him—far too obviously unconscious, Natzoon knew. Never would Chichoba have so risked showing himself had he not been quite certain of what he was about.

Very slowly he advanced to the centre of the open space, then stood still and drew out a big knife from his belt. He balanced it in his hand for a moment, then tossed it in air, catching it by the handle as it fell. With a single, unhurried stride, he crossed to an elm tree at the edge of the clearing and began sharpening the long blade upon the rough bark.

With a cry of horror which, in their alarm, they made no effort to restrain, the two men turned about and fled into the dense woods. Chichoba walked easily after them, passed without seeing the place where Natzoon had flattened himself behind a tree trunk, still stopping now and again to whet the knife against a tree. The two men drifted before him, sometimes looking anxiously back, sometimes blundering wildly forward, catching their feet in the swinging grapevines, tumbling over jutting roots, splashing through the puddles already forming under the pouring rain. Chichoba moved steadily onward, driving them away from the river, yet still seeming to see only the wet woodland about him and the lashing trees. Natzoon, without speaking, stood behind his elm trunk and watched them out of sight.

The guns from the boat sounded again and again and finally ceased. The storm of thunder and lightning was rolling away, from west to east, but the rain fell steadily, hanging in a gray curtain over the gray river. Natzoon walked down to the shore and watched the boat hold against the current for a long time, then finally swing outward to mid-

stream. The oars lifted and fell; the vessel gathered way and disappeared into the blinding torrent of rain. From time to time, there drifted back to him the boom of the guns, as the soldiers on board still sought to call back their lost comrades.

Presently, as he stood, Natzoon was aware of Chichoba at his elbow, his companion having slipped back through the wood without a sound.

"The canoe is yonder, behind that sycamore log," he told Natzoon. "Get in, and bend all your strength to the paddle. The time has come for us to pass these dallying fools at last."

"Look," Natzoon pointed to the water at their feet. "It must have rained above the rapids. The river is coming up."

It was true that the water already showed a certain perceptible rise.

"Then all the more reason for haste," returned Chichoba. "Now, indeed, we will have work to do."

They embarked and bent to the paddles, while the canoe flew forward, tearing up a wave of white water under her bow. The rain fell more and more heavily; the wind shifted and blew, cold and raw, directly against their course. Raindrops sluiced off their naked arms, ran down their backs and thighs, and gathered in a chill pool about their feet in the bottom of the canoe. The boat ahead had got well away from them and must be making good time, for even after an hour of paddling, they had not overtaken her. The river, sullen gray under the beating rain, was beginning to run more swiftly, for they were nearing the second great stretch of

Mississippi rapids—those which lay at the mouth of the Rock River. Through the misty curtain which hid the dripping shore, Natzoon caught glimpses of certain well-known wooded headlands, rounded bluffs, and familiarly conspicuous trees lifting into the skyline. Here was home; here was the spot where his people wintered, on the long tongue of land beside the tumbling stretch of rapids.

Amid the struggle with the wind and the increasing current, and in the noise of the pattering rain, there seemed little chance for conversation, yet it was here and now that Chichoba began at last to explain the plan of their journey. His talk was intermittent, for many times he was forced to bend all his effort and attention to holding the canoe steady against some specially blustering gust of wind. Yet it was not necessary for him to say many words, before the whole of his purpose began to unfold and make itself clear to his hearer's mind, more clear even than he quite intended.

"I happened to overhear the talk between the trader, Cloud, and Black Hawk, and what I heard was enough to make me sure that the Americans have but one object for their journey. Whatever they may say of friendship, for all their smooth words, their purpose is to slay us all and take our lands for their own."

Natzoon nodded gravely. He had got the same knowledge from the same trader's talk. Indians conquered new lands by courageous battle. Americans, it seemed, thought they could gain possession

of more country by a mere effort of words. Natzoon was as determined as was any other warrior of his people that the white men should win nothing from them. He listened intently as Chichoba went on,

"The great trouble of fighting against white men, is, as Black Hawk says, that they are so many, all seeking to tear and devour us. You may hope to get rid of one white man by slaying him quietly in the depths of the forest, but somehow his comrades always hear of it and come in greater and greater numbers to avenge his death. To kill one means only that you bring ten in his place."

He stopped speaking for a moment, as a big wave came slapping against the canoe and threatened to capsize it. As soon as they were steady again, Natzoon said quietly, although his heart was beating hard,

"And here are twenty men, not one. How do you seek to slay these and not bring a hundred in their place?"

"I have thought well what we should do. Between the Awipatuck village and St. Louis, where their own lodges stand, there are white men in cabins here and there who would carry news quickly, of such a disaster, to all the white men's kinsfolk. At the lead mines of Dubuque, there are also white men, who, though scarcely friendly to Americans, might, if they knew of it, let the news escape that so large a party perished by the hands of the Sac-and-Fox. Above Dubuque's mines, there is also the settlement at Prairie du Chien, where traders come down the Wisconsin River from Michilimacki-

nac, and here, too, would be much talk, if white men were slain close by."

"And so," said Natzoon, "you think that between here and the Dubuque mines is the safest place?"

Chichoba gave a grunt of assent.

"No white men dwell on this stretch of river," he said. "It is here that our business is best and most secretly carried out. Ewing and Blondeau might have carried word of disaster, had the white men got no farther than Awipatuck; therefore, Black Hawk—ah, he was wiser and more crafty than we knew—saw to their crossing safely the rapids at the Des Moines. When we guide them, you and I, over these higher rapids at the Rock River, it will be another matter."

"We are to guide them?" Natzoon asked, breathing quickly. "Will they follow us? And what—what more do we do?"

Chichoba was silent again but spoke at last.

"They will follow. Did we not guide them safely once? And in the midst of the rapids, should that big, awkward boat get upset among the rocks, who can tell what may come to pass? There may be nothing left to do save to let the river take them. And if a few still swim, we have each a gun and a knife."

Natzoon's heart beat quicker still.

"And when their comrades look in vain for their return," pursued Chichoba, "there will be no white man who can say that they did not perish by the river."

Another big wave had caught the canoe, whirling it about like a cork, so that Chichoba, beginning to speak further, ended his sentence hurriedly and perhaps not as he had at first meant to put his words.

"No one will know how they died, save Chichoba—the wise old dog fox."

Natzoon had begun to ask a question, but a new squall of wind and rain struck them, and they had much ado for the next ten minutes merely to keep themselves afloat. Chichoba apparently had taken little note of the words which had slipped from him, but they went, over and over, through Natzoon's mind. Chichoba, he alone, would carry the secret! What of the other, the one who was to help him, the boy who was half Chippeway and so without honor or value in anyone's eyes? Could there be any doubt that, when the task was over, the river was to take him also, with a bullet or a knife thrust to make his end more certain. Thus, the true tale of how the white men died would, indeed, be buried in the heart of one man who would never whisper it to another. If Black Hawk should guess what had happened, he would be too wise to ask.

The squall passed and Chichoba spoke peremptorily.

"Now paddle with all your heart and soul. It is here that we are to overtake them and offer guidance. Can you not hear the voice of the rapids?"

Through the mist and rain, carried by the downstream wind, there came the roar of swift water over rocks. There came, also, the steady sound of creak-

ing oarlocks, then a voice speaking an unintelligible order.

Chichoba plied his paddle desperately, sending the canoe forward in a cloud of flying spray. Nat-zoon, dazed though he was by the knowledge so fully revealed to him, labored also, since there seemed naught else to do. He took an instant's backward glance at his companion and saw once more upon Chichoba's face that same look of a wild creature just ready to fall upon his prey.

"Go on," Chichoba cried. "Wield your paddle. Do you mean to lose them?"

With the last flurry of wind and wet, the storm had passed by, leaving only a gentle, pattering shower and a stiff breeze, which had shifted and was now blowing across the stream instead of directly with the current. It broke the heavy clouds overhead, rolling them away above the eastward hills and parting the gray curtain of falling rain. Nat-zoon looked about him, at the wooded bluffs whose green was faintly tinged with the yellow of the coming autumn, at the clearing sky with its towering thunderclouds, at the touch of sunshine on the crest of the hills to the west. All this he had seen so often, and now perhaps was never to see it again. Was there any use in resisting the treachery of Chichoba, of snatching at his gun and knife in the bottom of the canoe, and doing battle for his life? No, the gunstock was next to Chichoba's knee, and the knife was well out of reach. It all seemed like some fantastic dream; the only thing that appeared real was that he must thrust his paddle deeper into

the water. By so doing, he was bringing himself ever nearer to his own destruction but at least he was satisfying his need for vigorous action.

Suddenly he dropped his blade across the bow of the canoe, and cried wildly to his companion,

"Look! look!"

A hundred yards before them lay the keel boat, rocking in the spent waves, with the oars shipped and the men at ease save for a group which worked at something near her bow.

The wide stream above them was turning again from gray to blue, with the long streaks of broken water marking the rocks beneath the surface.

"What are they doing?" exclaimed Chichoba, but Natzoon shook his head. He also was completely mystified by the actions of the white men, who were setting up a long heavy pole in the forward portion of their boat. A few moments later, a white wing like a bird's went climbing up the mast, unfurled, and spread itself to the breeze. Indians occasionally make shift to sail a little in a canoe, by holding up a blanket and moving before the wind. But Natzoon and Chichoba had no knowledge or experience of any such strange magic as this.

The boat heeled over, hung irresolute until she swung into her proper course, then skimmed away on a long reach upstream. When she was almost grounded upon the first reef, she turned again and once more sped northward, three times as swiftly as the stoutest paddle could drive a canoe. Once or twice she bumped on the rocks, but her heavy

planking made little of a blow which would have crushed and sunk an Indian vessel.

The two in the canoe sat open-mouthed, and stared at their appointed victims sailing steadily away from them, drawing farther and farther beyond their reach. Dusk was not far off, and there were eighteen miles of shoals and rapids to be crossed; but there was no failing of the breeze, and there was also the promise of a moon to rise later in the clearing sky. The many-mooded Mississippi had deserted her Indian friends for the moment, and was carrying their enemies safely away from the threatened destruction of which the white men were so unconscious. Clumsy, blundering, and yet guided by singular good fortune, they cleared the reefs, stemmed the current, and dwindled little by little in the distance until the sail was a mere white streak against the blue.

It was not until they were almost out of sight that Natzoon realized suddenly that the white men, in their escape, had saved his own life with theirs. A sudden gust of merriment swept over him, and he laid his hand limply upon his knees and gave himself up to wild, bitter mirth, to laughter which rocked the canoe and threatened to capsize it.

Finally he was able to quiet himself and, turning about, he regarded Chichoba rather sheepishly, as he sat immovable and waiting in the stern. A panther which has sprung and missed its kill could not show a look of more baffled fury than did Chichoba.

"Laugh your fill, you blind and empty fool," he snarled. He made a sweeping gesture with his pad-

dle. "Two of that company are over yonder in the forest, and we may be sure that they, at least, will trouble us no more. But since the boat and her voyagers have escaped us for a time, your tribe may still have use for you. I must think a little what is next to be done."

He turned the canoe, and with slow and weary strokes, far unlike his former breathless speed, he propelled it toward the bank. Natzoon was making only the merest show of dipping his blade now and then, for he was brooding over a thought which was growing ever greater in his mind.

When Chichoba had called him from his lodge, he himself had half formed a plan of his own, which was to save his people from the evil purposes of the white men. And now that his companion's project had fallen to the ground, was it not his turn to discover some better means to that same end? His mind fumbled and struggled with the whole difficult problem, for in his heart he did not really know where truth and justice lay. But blind impulse presently rose above groping reason; strangers were enemies; white men, Americans, were more dangerous foes than red. And this band of voyagers journeying deep into the new country—their coming was of such evil portent that they were certainly the most deadly enemies of all. Surely, surely it must be his duty to bring about their destruction, if he could. He began to believe that he could see the way, and again he wondered, Would the river help him?

CHAPTER V

THE LOOKOUT HILL

When two people are bound by circumstances to keep in each other's company, they may hate each other too bitterly for speech, but there is at least one thing they must do together—they must eat. For six days Chichoba and Natzoon had been living mostly upon the very scant rations of dried meat which they had carried with them. Occasionally Natzoon had slain a partridge or a duck with the bow and arrows which had been put into their boat; but there had been no possibility of firing a gun, the sound of whose report would have betrayed their presence to the enemy.

Now, as they landed, Chichoba took possession of all the weapons, and, bidding Natzoon gather wood for a fire, he himself set off in search of fresh meat. Natzoon made ready to carry out his orders, for it did not suit his plan to leave Chichoba even yet. There had fallen to his lot such a task as did not often come even to a full-grown warrior. He would carry it to the end, no matter what bitterness burned in his heart.

He had the fire ready, when presently Chichoba returned bearing a young deer upon his shoulders. A row of venison steaks was very shortly spitted on willow branches and set to broiling in the ruddy

heat. What a meal they ate, these weary companions who detested each other! It was, in spite of the uncongenial company, a glorious feast, with the savory smell of the venison mingling with all the perfumes of the wet, green woods, while the birds were all singing overhead, as they only can sing after hot, breathless weather and a clearing storm. The sun had dropped low, and long shafts of its last brightness came through the tree trunks to touch those two who sat opposite each other, eating hungrily but speaking little, on account of the barrier of black hatred between them.

Dusk came, and then darkness, with the bird voices falling to silence. Once, very far away, Nat-zoon thought he heard a shout, the voice of one of the men lost from the keel boat, now wandering panic-stricken in the pathless thickets. Chichoba heard it also and grinned evilly.

"Two of them!" he exulted. "It would be easy to follow and put an end to both, but we will let them live and suffer for a while. White men must not die too quick and pleasant a death."

Yet his smile vanished suddenly as well as his gloating pleasure, when he heard a new sound close at hand. From a willow tree not many yards away came, in slow, regular cadence, the melancholy voice of a whippoorwill.

"That is an evil omen, indeed," he cried in sudden and genuine terror; for it was the belief of many Indians that the call of the bird was really that of a warrior's soul which had failed to reach the Happy Hunting Ground.

He tried to continue in talk of the two lost boatmen, but little by little his voice began to falter. The bird called again and yet again, while the man's voice shook and at last broke off abruptly into a trembling prayer,

"Oh spare us, whoever you may be who wails among the tree tops! Oh save us and help us, all you gods of the forest."

Natzoon, sitting with his arm about his knees, watched unmoved the unreasoning fear which had so suddenly taken possession of his companion. Chichoba, it was well known, was the most recklessly brave of any of the Sac-and-Fox warriors; he had fought in many a battle against desperate odds and had never shown cowardice. Yet here was he, starting with every rustle among the leaves, pleading for mercy from he knew not what; while his comrade, a boy of fifteen, still untried by the experience of warfare, looked on quite unafraid. The truth was that the perils of those last days in the canoe, when Natzoon had at first slowly, and then abruptly, reached the knowledge that his comrade was coolly planning to put him to death, had steadied the boy so that now the nameless terrors of the forest were as nothing. To him the rustling of the leaves was a friendly sound; since close-growing thickets offered safe hiding place from every human enemy. The whippoorwill was, in his belief, only a lonely and hungry bird which had come forth to seek food after the rain.

"Even if it is the lost spirit of some dead warrior calling to us," he thought grimly, "I would rather

it were his soul than mine, which is walking abroad this night."

In very pity for Chichoba, he brought more wood for the fire and built it into roaring flames which lighted the tree trunks all round about.

"Lie down and sleep," he said to his companion, "the thing, whatever it is, bird or spirit, will not come close to such a fire as this."

Yet Chichoba at first seemed uncomfortable even by the cheerful, crackling blaze, but crouched before it, still glancing fearfully over his shoulder from time to time and all the while muttering charms and magic words to keep the evil away. Natzoon regarded him with open-eyed wonder.

"You know as many prayers and spells as a medicine man," he remarked at last. Chichoba stopped his whispering for a moment to reply,

"My father was bred to be a medicine man, and when I was still a boy he taught me all the charms that he knew."

"And did he become one?" Natzoon asked curiously. He could not remember hearing that Chichoba had such a man for a father.

The other's attention was distracted for a little from his terrors as he made reply.

"No, he became a warrior instead. There seemed, at one time, good hopes of his being made chief after Black Hawk's father, Pyesa, died. Since a medicine man is not often put at the head of his tribe, my father became a brave."

"But he was not chief. It was Black Hawk who ruled in the council lodge as soon as Pyesa was gone.

My mother has told me that." Natzoon had become idly interested in knowing more of Chichoba's father. It was strange that never in all of his life had he heard of a man who must have been a brave warrior indeed to have come so close to being chief of the Sac-and-Foxes. "Did he die in battle?" he asked insistently.

Chichoba gave him a strange, sidelong look.

"My father, Tauneen, the Man Who Talks with the Sun, could have been either a mighty chieftain or a man of great medicine, it matters little which. But, because at a certain moment, Black Hawk had won some passing fame through a fight with the Osages, he, a young warrior, was set in the place which my father should have had. Thereafter the two hated each other with such bitterness that it was scarcely possible for them to dwell in the same village. Tauneen, for a little, went to the southward, mingled with white men, became a guide to voyagers on the Ohio and the Mississippi, and learned much of white men's ways. Yet he scorned and detested white men's company and finally returned to his own village."

"And did he perish fighting against our enemies?" Natzoon asked again. It was the most important thing that one could know of any warrior, just where and how bravely he had died.

"He went away upon an expedition against the Sioux—and he did not come back. Those who went with him could never say what had become of him. Our braves defeated the enemy; but when they gathered together to return to their own people,

Tauneen was gone. We have never had news of the manner of his death. And so, I sometimes think, when I hear that unlucky bird"—here Chichoba's voice faltered again—"I think that it may be his soul crying to me, trying to tell me something out of the dark."

Natzoon sat, thoughtfully watching the flames for a little and listening to the bird whose voice was growing fainter.

"Your father hated Black Hawk," he observed slowly, "and you, yourself, think that the chief took the place Tauneen should have had. Yet you are now a close comrade and friend of Black Hawk. How can that be?"

Chichoba was not good at hiding his thoughts; most especially was he unsuccessful at such a moment of distracting terror.

"Black Hawk will not live forever," he said, "and a time will come when the Sac-and-Foxes will look for a chief again. Why should not Chichoba, who stands high among the warriors and in the council lodge, why should not he be the one upon whom the choice should fall? That place which ought to have been his father's and which should never have been Black Hawk's—why, I say, should it not be Chichoba's?"

Natzoon asked no further questions. He began to remember now, with vague recollection, that his mother had told him of Tauneen who had gone away to fight the Sioux and who had never returned. Somehow he seemed to feel that the memory was not a savory one, as though Tauneen had left be-

hind him a tale of little honor. However, Natzoon could not recollect much of the matter and presently gave up attempting to recall such dim memories. The sound of the two voices had frightened away the whippoorwill, and with it had departed Chichoba's terror.

"I would not fear the bird so much, save for thinking of my father," he explained lamely. "Nor would I have told you of my father except to make you see why I cannot listen unmoved to the wailing voice of the bird."

Natzoon nodded. He was thinking of his own father, straight, fearless, and handsome, with the clean good looks of one who is bravely honest and single of heart. Natzoon resembled him far more than he knew, not only in appearance but in character. A Sac-and-Fox warrior bold enough to love a Chippeway princess was one whose vigor of spirit might be expected to live again in his son.

In the silence, Chichoba stretched himself among the dry leaves and, being very weary, now that he was no longer afraid, fell almost instantly asleep. Natzoon was too much overwrought to feel immediately drowsiness and sat long awake. He had thought of discussing with his companion the plan which his mind was slowly completing, the scheme for carrying to its end the task in which Chichoba had failed. But it were better, after all, to let a night's sleep pass first, that they might both come to the new idea with clearer thoughts. So he suffered his comrade to sleep on, and sat watching the moonlight grow slowly clearer and whiter until it

dropped dappling light all about him from directly overhead. He attempted, under his breath, an imitation of the whippoorwill, until, having got it perfect, he called it aloud. He had the satisfaction not only of having the bird answer at a great distance, but of hearing that Chichoba, through whose dreams the sound had penetrated, whimpered with terror even in his sleep. He grew drowsy at last, yet seemed to be conscious even amid his sleepiness that some clumsily-moving and heavily-breathing creature had crept toward their fire and was staring at it longingly through the underbrush. He had not sufficient pity or even interest for those lost wanderers from the keel boat to arouse himself. Even while he knew dimly that one or both of them was watching him from among the thickets, he fell finally and deeply asleep.

He was awakened by the warning of that sixth sense which is bred in every wild thing, including Indians, and which gives notice of danger. A slight sound, the single snapping of a half-burned twig among the ashes, aroused him as completely as though it had been the noise of a pistol shot. Had Chichoba arisen with no more than unusual caution, making such slight movements and rustlings as Nat-zoon might have heard and taken note of, even in his sleep, the boy would probably have slumbered on. But instead, the older Indian had awakened, to sit up without a sound, to reflect long with his eyes upon the cold ashes and with an equally cold hatred in his heart. Coming to a certain determination, he drew forth his knife with such care that there was



His companion stood with knife drawn

never a movement to be heard, and rose to step noiselessly across the place of the dead fire. It was then that he trod upon the hidden twig, which broke with a tiny sound in that absolute stillness, and brought Natzoon into instant and vivid wakefulness. He took note not only of his companion, standing almost over him with the drawn knife in his hand, but also of the whole aspect of the clear, dewy forest, with the dawn breaking behind the trees.

He sprang to his feet just in time to escape the downward thrust of Chichoba's knife, and he dodged behind a swamp-maple trunk just quickly enough to avoid being slashed by a second stabbing blow. Chichoba drew back, his white teeth showing, his eyes narrowed; he was then, beyond all other times, the picture of a panther about to spring.

"Do you think," he snarled, "that I will let you come back to our village, that you may tell all men what I have tried to do and failed? They will say to each other, 'Chichoba is a fool.' And none will remember that I have been brave in battle or crafty in counsel, only that I have reached for a great prize and have missed it."

"Then you may put down your knife and spare yourself the trouble of slaying me, for I am not coming back." Natzoon spoke so decisively that Chichoba actually dropped his lifted weapon to his side and stood staring in bewilderment.

"What do you mean?" he said. "Where are you going?"

"Even to my own people, whose kinship you have so often taunted me with," responded Natzoon. "I am going to seek out the Chippeway."

The other still stared at him in blank astonishment, yet never relinquished his hold upon the handle of the knife. He sat down beside a log and laid the weapon across his knees, while Natzoon, still taking shelter behind the tree trunk against sudden attack, proceeded to explain. He had need of discussing and of asking advice before he could make complete his plan; and it seemed that he must take counsel thus, under threat of his life, setting forth his scheme to his would-be murderer.

"That band of white warriors will travel the length of the river," he began, "and everywhere they will speak falsely with their fair words and will seek to make friends with the Indians to their undoing. But suppose a certain messenger travels with them, warning the tribes before they come, telling those northern nations, who know little of white men, that we, who dwell nearer to them, that Black Hawk, who should know something of them, are all assured that they are no friends but deadly and dangerous enemies. Will they win any goodwill anywhere, if this is so? Will they make any treaties with red men who have been warned beforehand and who understand what they are?"

"And—" said Chichoba. "They can still do us harm, even if they make no friends with the men of our race." His face took on a look of crafty cunning as he thought the matter over and added,

"The farther those white men journey from the dwellings of their own kind, the simpler will it be to do away with them, and with fewer evil consequences. If there should be some—misfortune to their expedition as they voyage past the lands of the Sioux, who can blame us? Or after they plunge into the northern forest; there indeed the expedition may well come to an end. There are many ways by which a company of men may be swallowed up and lost forever in that silent country of lake and marsh and tall pine woodland. Especially may it be so with such a man as the young white chief, who is so bold and so blind that he never looks behind him."

Natzoon trembled a little as he listened to Chichoba. The other had fallen in at once with the idea of his plan; and yet, somehow, the boy liked it less when voiced by the older warrior than when he had been turning it over in his own mind. Seeing his hesitation, Chichoba went on relentlessly. "You are to look to it that the white chief meets one of these deaths which the forest holds, or you are never to come back to these pleasant lands beside the Mississippi. I myself will see that you do not live an hour after you have shown your face in our own country again."

The boy nodded. "I do not wish to return if I should fail," he declared.

"Do you think," went on Chichoba, "that you can keep pace with the band of white men and with their boat, which can put forth wings at need?"

"The Mississippi runs by crooked ways," replied Natzoon. "It is easier to travel by water, but for one who is used to the trails and who knows that he must make long marches, it is shorter and as rapid to journey by land. Sometimes I may win ahead of them and sometimes fall a little behind, but mostly I can keep near them. I will come as soon as they into the north country if I travel straight—as the crow flies."

Chichoba sat thinking in silence for a few moments, as though bending all his thoughts to perfecting the scheme.

"There is hope," he observed finally, "that these white men, if proper warning is carried in time, may not pass beyond the hunting grounds of the Sioux band, the Minowa Kantong, the People of the Lake. Can you carry your message to the man who rules them, the greatest of all the Sioux chiefs, Wabashah, the Red Leaf?"

"I have heard of him. I can find him easily," Natzoon agreed. "He is a very great chief."

"A Sioux chief is no more important than one who is at the head of the Sac-and-Foxes," returned Chichoba drily, evidently little pleased that the boy should know so much of another chief's greatness. "But Wabashah is strong enough, with his warriors, to serve our purpose well. And he is one who will let no man, be he white or of our race, attempt to call him master. Yet," he concluded, "if the white man slips through the Red Leaf's fingers, as he has slipped through ours, then you must indeed carry your message to the Chippeway. We, the Sac-

and-Fox, have little to do with that skulking nation, but this we both desire, that all white men, and above all, every American, should perish rather than gain a foothold in any Indian country."

"To the Chippeway," Natzoon assented, with a sinking of his heart. Would those unknown kinsfolk of his in the pine forests have any more regard for him than had his father's people who, most of them, bore him such ill will? Chichoba, reading his face darkly, cried out of a sudden,

"I see you hesitate; I do not believe that you mean to go. You intend treachery; you will steal through the wood, back to our own village, and make game of me before the warriors. But I will put an end to that. No one shall ever hear that Chichoba has failed."

He seized his gun, leveled it with somewhat hasty aim, and fired. The bullet cut the bark of the tree so close to Natzoon's head that the boy fell back to seek more effective cover. Chichoba pursued him, loading his gun as he came. For Natzoon, unarmed as he was, there was nothing to do but to flee through the wood, dodging in quick zigzags through the trees, so that his would-be destroyer could never take careful and murderous aim. Chichoba followed, driving him away from the river toward the hills, pursuing with such relentless intent, that the boy began presently to wonder whether escape were possible.

He was slighter and quicker than his assailant, but he could make no very great speed through the tangled underbrush; while Chichoba had the easier

way of following a trail which Natzoon had broken and, moreover, had the gun, which carried far. Only the blind rage of the older Indian saved Natzoon; for as Chichoba came behind, shouting imprecations and hideous threats, he loaded and fired in such passionate haste that all of his bullets, striking in every direction about the boy, went wild.

At last the fugitive realized, as he began to ascend a long slope, that his enemy was falling behind, and at this he wondered a little; for here the going was more open, and he made a less difficult mark for the pursuing shots. Then he caught a sudden breath of alarmed excitement, for he understood whither his course was taking him. He was mounting Black Hawk's Hill, the place where the chief communed with the spirits of cloud, water, and forest and where he allowed no members of the tribe to come near, not even to cross the lower slopes. Even now, he must be up yonder, praying in solitude to his gods for guidance. What wrath would he visit upon any person who came near to interrupt him? But death lay behind, and here was a chance of safety; for Chichoba, so fearful was he of ghosts and spirits, would never dare to ascend the sacred hill. Natzoon could hear his voice, crying a final curse upon him; he felt the whirr of a last spent bullet passing close to his head.

He mounted steadily and came presently to the backbone of a ridge, which extended like a spur into the lower lands and which afforded him a view, on the side away from the river, into a small ravine almost directly below. The sound of voices had

come up to him, and, in spite of the danger behind, he could not forbear stopping to peer down and see what was passing below.

The two men who had been left behind by the boat were plainly visible in the glade beneath; they were sitting opposite each other, the one on a stump, the other on a fallen log, both talking at once and quarrelling violently. Even after one night of being lost in the woods, they had become a wild-looking and dishevelled pair, their clothes rumpled and damp with dew, and their hair full of bark and leaves.

"The helpless fools, they could snare rabbits and grub roots," thought Natzoon, "and here they sit instead, roaring at each other with enough noise to attract a hundred enemies, were they near."

It was plain that each was blaming the other for the misfortune of their being left behind. Their angry voices waxed louder and louder, until finally one arose and struck furiously at his comrade, slipped in the wet grass, and went crashing down across the log, still roaring with rage.

Natzoon turned and continued to climb, his heart fairly in his mouth as he went forward and as he thought of facing Black Hawk's furious displeasure. There was a thing in him stronger than his dread and respect for his chief, a question which must be answered. He had made up his mind that he must, indeed, set forth on that journey and that he must carry it even to that end which Chichoba, rather than himself, had stipulated. He must see that the white men never came back. Thus only, he thought,

could he save his tribe. Yet first he must be certain of one thing, and concerning that he must ask Black Hawk, since surely a wise chief would know what was truth and justice.

The sun was not yet high when he came to the summit and saw that, although he had mounted by a gradual slope, the height fell away abruptly on one side, running down, almost perpendicular, to the Rock River. There was a wide view over level country, green with woods. The smaller stream ran, clear and shining, from the eastward, down to the Mississippi, which showed itself as a long gleam of reflected sunshine in the west. This broad basin of land, watered by two unfailing rivers, was Black Hawk's own domain. It was the single portion of the great, round world with which he was familiar; and, so far as he knew, it might have been the whole of the earth itself.

The chief had flung himself down upon the grass and, though he looked up when Natzoon approached, he said nothing and turned again to gaze out across the tree tops and the river meadows, with an expression such as the boy had never seen before. His gaunt face bore a wistful look of love and longing, of yearning over that smiling country of woods and silvery waters. Natzoon sat down a few yards away and waited until Black Hawk should choose to take notice of him. As he himself stared out over the soft sea of tree tops bowing all together in a wave of green, he had a sharp memory of that Iowa brave of the painted arrow, who had crept back all

alone to visit this same land which he also loved past the power of telling.

At last Black Hawk turned about and said to him sharply,

"Where are the white men? Did—did the river take them?"

He had hoped, it seemed, that the expedition might have come to grief amidst the tumbling waters of the second stretch of rapids, although he had taken no part in Chichoba's attempt to make that possible mischance a certainty.

As Natzoon told him all that had happened, he listened with a darkening face.

"The boat spread a white wing, you say, and fled from you more swiftly than you could follow? Yes, I have known that white men could do some such thing, but never have I seen them accomplish this on the upper river. Only great good fortune could have carried them across the rapids without striking on the rocks." After a brief pause he added,

"Have you come hither only to tell me this?"

"No," Natzoon told him, "I fled from Chichoba who sought to slay me, and I had, besides, a question which I must ask of you."

Black Hawk held up his hand as a sign for silence.

"Perhaps the gods sent you," he said. "Be still for a little, while I ask them whether or not I should destroy you for your boldness in coming thus unbidden to the place where I suffer no man to break my solitude."

As the chief sat thinking at great and silent length, Natzoon laid himself prone upon the long

grass, with his chin in his hand, waiting until his companion should come to his decision. He knew that he was in danger; yet so great had been the strain of the past hours that his mind could no longer dwell upon the hazards which surrounded him and slipped away into calmer reflections. He smiled a little to himself as he thought of Chichoba's terrors of the night. Since he had never been accepted by the other members of the tribe, he had known long hours of loneliness, during which he had thought much of all sorts of problems connected with his people. He had seen before how the bravest warriors were the most afraid of the gods of the forest, and he had come to understand that these terrors really belonged to a time, generations ago, when the Indians had no horses or guns or axes, when hunting was difficult, and when life was in constant and desperate danger from cold, from wild beasts, and from starvation. Then, the woods, the rivers, and the plains held such great peril that every Indian walked in dread and sought safety in constant prayers to those gods and spirits of forest and prairie and stream which, so they thought, were always watching and ready to destroy them.

Now life was quite different; the herds of horses had suddenly multiplied all over the Western plains, although very few Indians knew that these wild steeds were the children of a few stray mares lost by white men—by the Spaniards who invaded Mexico. Later, the traders had come, with guns and powder to sell, and, as a result, the red man was suddenly the lord of the forest and the plain.

He had abundant food and need no longer live in fear. Yet certain Indians still held to the old habits of thought, to their awe and terror of the woodland gods, and to their savage hatred for all races other than their own. Chichoba, Black Hawk, and many of the braves among the Sac-and-Fox, still thought that to cling to all that was old, to fight against all that was new, was the whole duty and the whole safety of a proper warrior.

Natzoon, young, questioning, and alert, had small patience with many of these doubts and needless fears. Yet he was too much of the same blood as those about him, to be able to come much closer to knowing the real truth. He could never shake off his instinctive feeling that the river, so great and strong and changeable, did not really stand for a powerful spirit which was sometimes sullen, sometimes evilly threatening, and sometimes enticing, all sweet and friendly smiles. His groping mind could not pierce very far through the dark cloud which shrouded every Indian's knowledge, yet he went a little farther than he had ever felt his way before, on this morning that he waited beside Black Hawk in the clear stillness of the lonely hill.

Both of them were so quiet that birds sailed, unheeding, past them. Little meadow mice stared at them with beady eyes and then went undisturbed about their business in the long grass. Finally a big crow, its dark, ragged wings flapping heavily, went past so close, that a single black feather came dropping down, whirling round and round, until it stood upright in the grass beside Black Hawk's knee.

The grave, silent Indian moved at last, took up the feather, and said abruptly to Natzoon,

"We have been shown the way at last. Here is the sign for which I have waited." He launched the long feather like a dart and flung it into the boy's hand. "Can you read this message which the gods have sent to us?"

"I cannot," answered Natzoon. He had often seen crow's feathers fall and could see no significance in this single one.

"You are of the Crow clan," the chief said slowly.

Natzoon nodded. The Indians of a tribe are bound by certain ties of kinship into a few large and many-branched families, portions of which often inhabit different villages or owe their allegiance to different lesser chiefs. Each family takes for its sign, or totem, some special animal or bird, from which the clan draws its name. Natzoon's father was of the Crow kindred and carried the rude representation of a broad-winged raven painted upon his buffalo-hide shield. That shield and that kinship Natzoon had inherited; he was a Crow also.

Black Hawk seemed to be certain that here was a supernatural sign and translated it into a message that this boy of the Crows should be forgiven his boldness in climbing, unbidden, to the summit of the Lookout Hill.

"What was it you came to seek?" he said at last. He spoke harshly for, even at the command of his gods, he could not regard graciously this defiance of his own orders.

"I would ask you two things," Natzoon said. He stopped for a moment, trying to find words for that doubt which had been gnawing steadily at his mind ever since his meeting with the solitary warrior beside the river.

"We love our own lands, and we think that the white men would take them from us, and we call them evil and unjust that they should do so. Yet others loved these lands even as do we, and we took their hunting grounds from them and kept them for our own."

Had the Sac-and-Fox tribe any greater right to the shores of the Mississippi than had those men who dwelt there before them or those who should come later? To Black Hawk the answer was a very simple one.

"Indians are born to fight amongst themselves and to hold their lands as best they can against their enemies. It has always been so and therefore must always be, that the weaker gives way to the stronger. But with the coming of the white men, things are not the same. They seek to gain by fair words what they cannot win by strength. They try to blind our eyes to the truth—which is that men of different races can never be friends."

Natzoon was not wholly convinced. He felt in his heart that the young leader of the white men's company was sincere in his overtures of goodwill; he was certain that no man whose feelings were so plain to read could attempt to deceive anyone. Yet he still despised the white warrior for seeking friendship with those who were his natural foes. In his

eyes, it was a proof of weakness and cowardice for a man to avoid battle with another who was plainly hostile to him. And now his chief said that the white man was evil and dangerous as well as a coward. He had been taught from his earliest boyhood, that by a chief's word a warrior must abide. He could do no other than carry out his self-appointed task as best he could.

"You were to ask me two things?" pursued Black Hawk.

Natzoon drew a long breath and cast his last hesitation from him.

"I would have you give me arms—your gun and your knife," he said, trying to speak casually yet with dignity. "I am going on—on a journey against our enemies. There have been times, before this, when a single warrior has risked himself for the whole tribe. It may be that I—I can be of great service for the safety of us all. But Chichoba has taken my gun, and I cannot march weaponless."

Black Hawk surveyed him with astounded wonder. "You—" he cried. "You—the Chippeway!"

Natzoon felt himself grow hot all over, but he stood his ground.

"Even I," he said. "And if I fail, you will never be troubled with my presence again. All I ask is a weapon."

His chief regarded him keenly. If curiosity prompted him to offer questions, cold dignity held him back. And Natzoon forestalled him, crying out,

"Do not ask me. It were better for all of us that none knows beyond myself and Chichoba."

"Chichoba helped you to hatch this scheme?" asked Black Hawk.

"He did," Natzoon admitted.

"Then I am satisfied," returned his chief, "and it is better, as you say, that you do not say too much of the matter. I think you will not come back," he ended decisively.

"It may be so," Natzoon agreed indifferently.

Silently Black Hawk handed him his weapons; but with no word to speed the boy on his way, he turned about and stood once more studying the far landscape. Natzoon, on his part, swung the gun over his shoulder, thrust the black crow's feather into his braided hair, and went away down the hill.

He had scarcely gone fifty yards before he caught the sound of Black Hawk's voice calling to him. He stopped and looked back to see his chief come striding after him. Black Hawk drew near and stood with his face close to Natzoon's and with his eyes burning like living coals.

"The gods have put it into my heart to tell you why I hate all white men," he said. "That there may be no doubt in your mind, that you may go whole-spirited upon your errand, I will give you knowledge which I have never whispered to another living being. Years ago, when I was young, yet already a chief. I was hunting southward on the Mississippi, far from the village where we dwell now. It was spring, and there had long been hunger in the lodges, for game was very scarce. I fol-

lowed a deer for a night, a day, and another night, and in the morning I shot it beside a stream. I was weary, and in my new pride, I was careless; I lay down after I had skinned it and fell asleep. When I awoke it was to find that five white men, in canoes, had floated noiselessly down with the current and were leaping ashore, close beside me."

He paused for a moment to moisten his dry lips, as though he could not tell of this thing which he had held so long and so deeply hidden as a secret, tearing at his memory.

"I was young then; I still thought that white men might wish to be friends. I jumped up, but I waited to speak with them. Then one caught my shoulder, and I knew that they were enemies. I sought to send a bullet through his head; but the rifle was a worthless thing, such as traders love to sell to Indians, and it missed fire. They seized me, they were strong men all of them, and I was only one amongst five. They held me, and they beat me, flogged me with whips until the blood ran down my back, struck me over the head until the blood ran into my eyes and blinded me. Then they flung me into the bushes and embarked once more in their canoes, laughing uproariously because they had caught an Indian sleeping."

Again he paused, for his voice was shaking. But he steadied it and went on.

"I lay in the forest until my scars healed. Those of my village thought that a wild cat had leaped from a tree and had torn my back and shoulders, leaving those furrowed marks which will be there

until my life's end. But it was no such sweet and gentle creature as a wild cat or a panther; it was men—men I say—white men! Now you know what white men are!”

He wheeled about and was off up the hill again, giving Natzoon no chance to speak. The boy, as he knew his chief would desire, went straight onward, without even turning his head.

It was plain to him now, what it was which had broken Black Hawk's calm on the occasion of the council, when the white commander had said that justice would be done if a white man laid hands of violence upon an Indian. Further than this, the thought which was burning his heart was that Black Hawk had told him the secret for two reasons, one, because it would hold him more relentlessly to his purpose, and the other, because the Sac-and-Fox chief was certain that he would never see Natzoon again.

He traveled steadily onward, with the long, unhurried stride of one who knows that his journey is to be a lengthy one. Instead of plunging once more into the low, wooded country at the edge of the river, he struck inland along a spur of Black Hawk's Hill and reached the line of bluffs which stood three or four miles back from the stream. Here the way was more open and afforded a chance to move more swiftly than did the wet, close-grown bottom lands which spread, to his eyes, as he looked downward, a level floor of green tree tops. All of these low grounds afforded space for the stream to spread abroad at high water; for the big Mississippi de-

manded elbow room when she came roaring down from the north with her mighty spring floods. The lines of bluffs on each side were sometimes eight, ten, even twenty miles apart, yet here and there the distance narrowed, and they came together with only a mile between and with the river washing directly at their feet.

Somewhere, drowned in that flat sea of green, were those two men lost from the boat's company; somewhere Chichoba was camping; and somewhere, far behind now, Black Hawk was looking out along the wooded ridges and in his heart speeding Natzoon upon his way. Over and over a certain refrain rang through his head as he went along,

"Now you know what white men are!"

He stopped at noon for a scant meal of partridge, then pushed on, slept without eating, and arose with daylight to travel again. For three days he journeyed at resolute speed. The distant river showed its loops and bends and long, gleaming reaches, sometimes as far away as his eye could see. Yet he knew well just what course to follow; he avoided the spurs of hills and crossed the abrupt valleys which here and there cut into the higher lands. He was, in truth, traveling as the crow flies, journeying by a way many miles shorter than the twisting course of the river.

There was a certain point, fifty miles distant from the Rock River, where the Mississippi once more drew in toward the hills and ran at the very edge of a high bluff. Over and over again Natzoon had calculated, as he went along, the speed at which the

keel boat had traveled by oars or under sail. He had measured the chances of delay on bars, counted the number of nights which the white men must camp, and had promised himself that at this point he would find that he had overtaken them.

He reached the appointed spot at last, weary, hungry, and heavy-eyed, for he had slept and eaten little and had pressed on with no thought of rest. He came out upon the tall headland from which he could look for many miles down the long reach of water, which showed like dull steel in the afternoon light of a cloudy day. Far, far away against the gleaming gray was a black dot, which might be a log floating half a mile away, or might also be a boat at many times the distance. If it were a log, it would be drifting downstream and away from him, and would presently disappear. He threw himself down at the very edge of the steep drop to the water and watched and watched, until his head swam and the black shape danced before his weary vision.

It grew larger; it came closer and closer, until he could see the faint, regular motion of dipping oars. The deep channel ran just below him, so that presently the long, heavy boat passed directly beneath his straining eyes.

He could see baggage piled up in the bow, the bales and barrels ranged under the gunwale, the steadily toiling men bending all together with the big sergeant pulling the stroke oar. The Lieutenant was sitting in the stern, steering, with the black spaniel between his knees. No one of them looked

upward to see that peering face at the edge of the hill.

Natzoon saw the little dog move, wag his small tail, and rub his head against his master's knee; he saw the hand of Zebulon Pike move caressingly over the smooth head. A curious feeling shot through him such as he had never known before, an emotion which combined hostility, anger, the pain of jealousy, and some other strange stirring of the heart which he could not in the least understand. Whatever was the strange sensation which so suddenly took possession of him, he knew, once and for all, that now there was to be no turning back. Even should he journey until he was starved and reeling from weariness, even should his word given to Black Hawk become a faded memory, he would still follow those two, the man and the dog, who had passed, quite unheeding, so close below him. If necessary, he would pursue them to the very world's end.

CHAPTER VI

QUAKING SANDS

It was on the east side of the river that Natzoon had traveled so far, and it was from one of the eastern bluffs that he had watched the keel boat pass. Now he made a definite change in his course. He was certain that from this place northward game would prove more plentiful and, the way shorter, should he follow on the western side. As soon as the boat's company had drawn out of sight beyond the first bend, Natzoon descended hastily to the river's edge and slipped into the water. It felt warm and friendly to his tired, dusty body, as he struck out determinedly for the opposite shore.

It was a long swim, half a mile at least, with the current carrying him downstream for another quarter. He came ashore where the big roots of willows and sycamores stood out in gnarled ridges in the black mud. He laid hold of a great looping root, pulled himself out of the water, and set off into the dusk, without an instant of delay, to follow the white men.

Through six days and over a greater number of miles than he could ever have reckoned, Natzoon followed Zebulon Pike and his company of boatmen. Sometimes the Indian boy fell a day's march behind; sometimes, on account of some short cut on

his own journey or some mishap on theirs, he drew ahead and was obliged to wait until he should see them pass. On one or two occasions, he lost them altogether and was astonished, himself, at the frantic anxiety which he felt until he found them again.

By the sixth day, he had dropped a little behind, on account of their having a favoring wind, and he was hurrying forward with headlong speed to get abreast of them again. His way led across a small ravine, at the bottom of which ran a sandy creek bed, with only a few pools and a thread of water to show where, with more abundant rain, there had once been a rushing stream. Like most of the other rivulets of that region, the creek ran over level ledges of white limestone, like steps, with hollows between, filled up with sand. Natzoon, giving little thought to the crossing, save that it must be accomplished in haste, strode straight across the nearest stretch of sand and, at the first step, was sunk to his knees.

The space was narrow; he felt certain that he could go forward; he floundered another step and was covered to his waist. He cursed his haste and folly and made a desperate, straining effort to free himself, only to feel his body sink helplessly, a little deeper, into the clutching quicksand.

He knew well that many of these streams held basins of quaking sand, where an unwary horse or a deer or a heedless hunter might disappear forever. Had he been less blind with haste or less determined to win across when once he had begun to sink, he might have drawn back from the danger, but now

he was squarely in the middle of the trap and out of reach of the solid bank on either side. He was submerged almost to his armpits; his breath was coming in gasping sobs, so violent had been his attempts to struggle free. He looked up at the bright sky above him, at a solitary dark-blue kingfisher, which had been catching minnows in the pool above and which now sat upon the dead branch of an oak, regarding him impassively, as he sank slowly deeper and deeper. Suddenly the bird gave a strident call and fluttered away.

With a great effort, Natzoon summoned back the cool presence of mind which alone might hope to save him. He threw forward such of his body as could still be moved and attempted to work his way face downward toward the opposite bank. He made a little progress, then sank a little, then crawled a little farther. His arms, from weariness, seemed to weigh a thousand pounds, and his legs had no feeling at all. He was aware of a curious, whimpering cry behind him, but he had not enough strength to spare even for turning his head. He could hardly breathe; he could not look up; but he was fighting still.

Then suddenly he became conscious of something soft and warm which touched his cheek, withdrew, then touched it again, while the gentle whimpering sounded directly in his ear. He managed to turn a little and saw, to his amazement, that it was the little black spaniel which came light-footed up to him, then, beginning to sink, withdrew a foot or

two and stood, whining and crying, on what seemed to be solid ground.

In a floundering agony of effort, Natzoon swung himself to one side, reached out at arm's length, and caught hold of the edge of a knife blade of rock barely covered by the sand. The little dog yelped with delight and leaped and barked upon the tiny island of safety, as Natzoon slowly managed to grasp the ledge with his other hand and dragged his reluctant, sinking body out of the sand. He pulled himself out upon the narrow stone and sat there for a moment, filling his exhausted lungs, while the sweat ran down his body. He could see, by the footprints of the little dog, where with his light weight and spreading paws he had tried this spot and that, until the blind instinct that guides animals to safety had told him just where the outcropping ledge extended across the bed of quicksand.

Very carefully, going part of the way on his hands and knees, Natzoon followed those small footprints across the narrow bridge of safety, and, once on the firm ground again, he rolled in sheer delight upon the grass and hugged the eager, no less joyful dog in both his arms. Then, presently, they got up and journeyed on together side by side, parallel to the big river, until at the end of a mile, the spaniel, with a brief wag of his tail, bade farewell to his rescued friend and turned away toward where wide, blue water showed between the trees. Natzoon needed no words to tell him that he had once more drawn even with the boat. He felt again a pang of stabbing jealousy that his small companion would de-

sert him so abruptly the moment his master was near.

Thereafter he walked more carefully, and he was able, as a rule, to keep fairly well beside the boat, day's journey by day's journey. There were, thus, few adventures which befell the white men which he did not manage to observe. And more than once, hidden among the thickets close to their camps, he held friendly converse with small black Pluto, who, after a short interview, would go away to his own people, wagging his wise little tail and keeping his own counsel.

The Indian boy was a witness of that incident when the keel boat overhauled a group of Indian canoes paddling close to shore. The Lieutenant, by means of signs, was offering to buy fresh meat from the three warriors who, with their squaws, were evidently returning from a hunt. They pretended not to understand him, shook their heads blankly at all his offers of intended purchase, until his boat got well under way again. Then they cried out to attract his attention, held up a long row of venison haunches, to show both that they understood what he was asking, and that they had what he desired but did not choose to barter with him. They shouted in great derision, thinking, evidently, that it was a fine jest to make game of the white men. The keel boat was passing so near the shore from which Natzoon was watching, that the boy could see the leader's hot flush of anger, as the color rose under his fair skin at the taunts of savage wit. One of the soldiers laid aside his oar and took up his gun,

but at Lieutenant Pike's quick command, he put it down reluctantly. Natzoon wondered at the young leader's ability to control a burst of wrath which could easily have led to bloodshed. The boy's own temper was hot and hasty, often leaping out like a quick flame and causing him much trouble as a result of unwary words. He could scarcely understand, as he watched the betraying color under Pike's fair skin, how a man could be so thoroughly a master of himself.

The Indian boy had felt a wave of angry pleasure when he heard the warriors of his race making open show of their scorn of the white men. It was followed by a flood of stinging humiliation when he saw that the leader did not deign even to strike back at the coarse defiance of the Reynards.

"For that I will hate him more than ever," vowed the boy within himself. Yet he could not help knowing that the other was holding in check a tempest of anger which was quite equal to any of those with which Black Hawk so often burst out with passionate rage against those who had offended him. The small incident made Natzoon wonder more than ever over the puzzle of white men's ways.

At more than one village beside the river, Natzoon heard that the white men had stopped there and had spoken fair words wherever there was an interpreter. The leader left presents and had everywhere made pressing request that, should the two missing men be found, they should be given food and moccasins and sent forward in a canoe.

Such good impression as Pike's generosity and earnestness might have chanced to make among the Sac-and-Fox villages was presently wiped out by the arrival of Natzoon with his warning and his news of the inflexible hostility of Black Hawk. Every chief and head man listened gravely to what the boy had to say and nodded agreement.

"We will never trust a white man," they all assured him, "though the young leader might have deceived us for a moment. If Black Hawk thinks ill of him, that is enough. Black Hawk is a wise leader."

"We promised the young leader everything," Natzoon was told by one cautious old chief, where gifts had been left to buy help for the two lost soldiers. "The white man gave us bags of salt and blue cloth, it is true, but he left us no good, warm rum as the traders do. But we say nothing that is unfriendly, we do not wish the white company to suspect us. We all think that it would not be well should harm come to them within our lands. Wait until they are amongst the Sioux. Or in the tamarack swamps and reed-filled marshes of the Chippeway—there is the best place for their tale to come to an end."

A little later, Natzoon observed that the speed of the journey was slackening, that his lengthy day's marches carried him well ahead of his fellow travelers, and that he must wait longer and longer for them to catch up to him. He stole close to their camp one night to see if he could discover the reason. It was a hot, moonless evening, with only the smallest fires burning, just sufficient for the food to

be cooked and the mosquitoes driven away with the least possible flame and heat. In the darkness he was able to creep so close that he could almost have touched the young Lieutenant, lying stretched out upon a patch of green grass seemingly asleep but restless and muttering, evidently sick with fever. The words were not comprehensible to the intent listener in the dusk; but it almost seemed as though Zebulon Pike was once more hearkening to the voice of the river and was talking to her in return, reasoning, pleading, and protesting. Once he sat bolt upright so suddenly that Natzoon shrank back, thinking that he had been discovered. But the white man was looking straight ahead of him, staring wildly at the stream, and most evidently speaking to her now, where she swept past, big and dim, showing the reflected light of a few wavering stars. He dropped back at last, with a sigh of exhaustion and lay very still until a broad-shouldered corporal came blundering through the dark and knelt down beside his commanding officer. He lifted the Lieutenant carefully, so that the sick man might drink from a cup of something which he had brought. Zebulon Pike seemed to rouse himself from his feverish stupor; he drank and spoke naturally. There was such unquenched gaiety in his tone, that as the big corporal answered, he laughed, but with a break in his voice.

He laid the officer back upon the grass again, with clumsy attempts to make him comfortable, and all night he sat immovable beside him, hushing him with awkward effort, when he broke once more into delirious talk. Corporal Bradley would have been

astonished had he known that another watched with him all through that same hot night, that a thin, dark figure sat silent just beyond a clump of bushes and kept vigil as faithfully as he.

In the morning, Natzoon watched the soldiers carry their leader down to the boat, Bradley walking beside and giving a hundred directions as to how it should be done. The Lieutenant was wide awake and conscious now, joking with his men, although he was not able to stand upon his feet. The hot heaviness of the night had cleared to a clean and sparkling morning, with a reviving freshness in the air that told of the oncoming of autumn. Natzoon, weary from his sleepless watching, lay down and slumbered for an hour and then set himself once more to following the trail.

It was at the sparse little settlement of Dubuque that he saw them next. Here a Frenchman had set about digging out the deposit of lead lying in the limestone hills a few miles back from the river, and here had gathered about him a handful of his own countrymen and a somewhat larger number of Indians. Natzoon had reached the place well in advance of the keel boat, nor had he caught more than a few glimpses of the expedition during the intervening days. The men had camped on the opposite bank of the river for several nights, so that Natzoon had only distant sight of the campfires. It seemed to him that they were traveling more quickly in this fresh, cool weather and that the distant figure in the stern sat more upright, instead of lying prone among bales and blankets.

He had quickened his own pace, so that they might not leave him behind, and had lost sight of them at the cut-off of a bend in the stream, and so came before them into the little settlement of Dubuque. He heard much talk of their coming, for news of their journey had drifted northward, and all were curious to see the Americans, who, as the Indians were told, were to be their new masters.

"Masters!" cried out a strutting brave, swaggering down the crooked lane which did duty as a street between lodges and cabins. "Are the Sac-and-Fox to call any men masters? We will let them know what we think of such a word as *master*. But," he added cannily, "we will wait to speak our minds until the white men's gifts are given. I hope he has plenty of rum."

From lodge to lodge, from cabin to cabin, Nat-zoon went, speaking softly to each principal warrior, explaining and warning and telling them all what Black Hawk thought of the expedition. Many wise old heads nodded; many younger and fiercer faces looked eager. But all were of the same opinion in the end. It were better to let the company pass safely and with a show of friendship, until they were far away from their own kindred and the tidings of their destruction could never be verified. Thus, the earnest young leader was met everywhere with the same stolid indifference; he was listened to with respectful attention; but none of his requests or demands were ever really heeded. It was so here, as in all other places. He wished to see the lead mines—there were, unfortunately no horses to

bear him and his companions thither. He asked that the Indians give up the flags and medals presented to them by the British—he was met first with uncomprehending stares, then with the same happy suggestion which Black Hawk had first put into words, that they liked better to have two fathers than one.

Natzoon had scanned the Lieutenant's face, thin and colorless but eager still, as the boat's company came up from the beach. He must have passed the worst of his illness, for he walked steadily. The Indian boy forbore to push forward in the crowd, although there was certainly no chance that he would be recognized. He was still standing near the river, when a shout arose and two canoes came gliding to the landing. It was no wonder that a cheer of welcome went up from the white men, for here were their two lost comrades, accompanied by two Indians and, most surprisingly, by Maurice Blondeau.

Even as he came up from the boat, the Frenchman's quick eye discovered Natzoon among the spectators, and, though he looked astounded for a moment, he discreetly avoided any notice of recognition. If he had heard of that message of ill will which was traveling with the white men, and if he guessed that here was the one who bore it, he made no sign. Perhaps he was certain that remonstrance would only be dangerous to his good standing among the Sac-and-Fox, and that it would, in any case, be of no avail. But later, while the two lost soldiers were being congratulated by their comrades,

Blondeau slipped through the crowd and spoke to Natzoon.

"I found those two twenty-five miles above the Rapides des Roches, spent, starving, and almost beside themselves with terror. Chichoba was driving them steadily before him; when they paused, he had only to show them a glimpse of himself with his long knife, and they were off again at top speed. It was his idea that they should die of hunger and weariness rather than that he should lay hand upon them. Ah, the great, blind, clumsy oafs, to set forth into the unfriendly forest without weapons and to let themselves be left behind by the boat. They had been living on raw mussels and a few fish which they had caught with their hands. I discovered them, as I journeyed northward; they were wandering, helpless and almost spent, beside the river. I took them into my canoe; for white men must stand by one another, even as red men must do."

He gave Natzoon a knowing grin, which showed all his white teeth, and went away to help Zebulon Pike in his talk with the Indians. The Lieutenant rewarded most generously the two braves who had helped Blondeau to bring the men up the river, although the recipients of the gifts went away grumbling under their breath at the lack of rum.

Blondeau, it seemed, was on a trader's journey to Prairie du Chien, the settlement at the mouth of the Wisconsin River, where traffic from the Great Lakes came west and turned northward to the forest country. In return for his picking up the lost soldiers, Lieutenant Pike had offered him a place in

the keel boat, so that the Frenchman was to travel in the Americans' company as far as this French, British, and Indian village which was to be their next important stopping place. Before the expedition set forth again, Natzoon contrived to have further speech with the Frenchman; and although Blondeau was a person not freely talkative and was most discreet, the Indian boy, by diligent effort, learned a good deal of value concerning the white men's plans.

"By my advice," so Blondeau put it with a certain swagger, Lieutenant Pike was planning to change his method of voyaging at Prairie du Chien. He had decided to load his goods, arms, and provisions into two smaller bateaux, of the type used in the northern rivers, boats which could be got over the Falls of St. Anthony. These falls and rapids his present vessel could never pass. He was to hold council with the Winnebagoes and the Sioux at Prairie du Chien, and was to have a great meeting of all the lesser and greater Sioux chiefs at the mouth of the St. Peter's River.

"I will go no farther with them than to Prairie du Chien," Blondeau said. "I am anxious to pass ahead of that trader, Cloud, who went by Awipatuck just before the keel boat came. Cloud and his party are traveling slowly, trafficking with the Indians, and I should like to win ahead of them, to buy furs in certain villages before they come with their cheap beads and their poisoned rum. They are only a few days' journey ahead now, as I hear from the villages as we go by. The keel boat, with a good

wind and with me to tell the men something of where the channel runs, should far outstrip that company of trading canoes."

"And why do you go no farther than Prairie du Chien? Does not the white man wish you to go all the way into the forest country?" Natzoon asked.

Blondeau gave him a knowing look.

"I understand the Sioux, I understand the Sac-and-Fox, but I do not know the Chippeway. A trader should stay in his own familiar neighborhood and not seek to venture too far. Monsieur le Lieutenant wishes me to travel farther with him, to be interpreter when he holds his great council with the Sioux. But I think that to do so will be but to waste my very good and valuable time."

"Why?" questioned Natzoon.

"He will talk to them all of peace," smiled Blondeau, very wise in the ways of war-loving Indians and very unbelieving in this matter of putting an end to long-standing hostilities. "That is a strange thing to talk of—peace—to Sioux who dwell at the very edge of the Chippeway country. But this Monsieur Pike is a young man and very full of hope. The red men will at least be curious to hear what he has to say."

As his friend from the Awipatuck village walked away, Natzoon was reflecting that the white men, to fulfill all these plans, must make stops of some days each at the places of which Blondeau had spoken and that his own journey, therefore, might proceed with less haste. He could, indeed, march at

his own pace and find them again above the St. Peter's River and the Falls of St. Anthony.

Yet he had one thing more which he must ask and, driven by a curiosity of which he did not know the cause, he ran after Blondeau and caught his arm.

"The young white chief," he said, "he was sick; is he well again?"

"Well enough," Blondeau told him. "He was burning up with fever for three days, so his men say; but he was determined to go forward and now is in a fair way to be soon cured and whole again. He has courage, though he is a headlong young gentleman and has not yet stored away overmuch of wisdom."

The keel boat set forth again at daylight, and Natzoon, in almost the same hour, was afoot and away upon his own journey. Yet he marched more carefully than he had done before, and he looked about him with increasing wariness; for he was coming now into the Sioux country. It was true that the Sioux were said to be at peace with the Sac-and-Fox for the present; but who could ever know when such a peace would break its slender hold upon the two nations, when a single chance encounter and overquick blow might let loose the uneasily slumbering hostilities again. The boy began to feel himself weary beyond the power of words to tell. The long miles of straining haste, the brief and insufficient stops for hunting and for eating, the troubled sleep, through which there penetrated al-

ways the knowledge of how soon he must be up and away, all these began to tell upon him.

"As the crow flies," he kept repeating to himself. He could remember often seeing crows after a long flight, flapping clumsily and heavily in an attempt to go forward, yet scarcely seeming to make any progress. It appeared to him that it was in just such fashion that he was traveling now. From mere pressure of excitement, he still drove himself to forced marches, sleeping little and eating less, so worn in mind and body that he seemed almost to have forgotten whither he was going.

He began, finally, to understand that, in spite of the utmost of desire, he could not press forward at the old speed and that there was no real necessity for doing so. He trudged determinedly onward, yet sometimes reeled as he went, for neglect of sleep and proper food were making him light-headed.

He came, one night, to a river which wound in and out among islands to fall into the Mississippi, a stream too broad and deep for him to attempt crossing in the dark and in his condition of spent strength. He concluded, at last, that here he must sleep fully and eat abundantly, if he were to hope to go onward, and he noted, even in the darkness, that the thickets, which lined both banks of the river, were cut through with game trails and gave more promising prospect for hunting than any he had passed for some time.

He was too greatly worn with journeying to seek even a rabbit or a partridge for his supper, but lay down among the aspen trees and went to sleep hun-

gry. He promised himself that, with the earliest daylight, he would set about hunting down a deer and that he would not go forward until he had succeeded. Common sense told him that he must rest and eat if he were to hope to carry his journey to its end.

He thought that he caught sight of a spot of red light among the islands, as though from a camp pitched at the mouth of the stream. It might be Sioux, it might be the men of the keel boat, who were stopping there to pass the night; he cared very little which it was, so exhausted was he with the long following of that single trail. He slept deeply; but with the first paling of the sky for dawn he was once more awake.

He arose, stiff, weary, and without enthusiasm, took up his gun, and stole down to the water's edge. A fresh trail of sharp-pointed hoofs showed where a deer had come down to drink and had grazed away in unfrightened leisure among the grassy clearings near the shore. Natzoon followed, moving slowly and noiselessly, alert to every sound and movement among the slender tree stems. The animal was meandering about in such gentle aimlessness that the boy was certain it could not have traveled far. Presently he caught sight of it, not the mere black-tailed buck for which he had hoped, but a tall elk, with slim, branching horns and white hind quarters. It was grazing at the far side of a distant glade, with a chance line of clear space among the trees extending all the way from Natzoon to the spot where it stood. The shot was a very long one; but it of-

ferred a fair chance of bringing down a substantial prize.

Natzoon rested his gun upon a jutting branch and took long and very careful aim. He had just decided that a place a dozen feet to the eastward offered a better point of vantage and was preparing to change his position, when he was aware of a slight rustle among the bushes only a few yards away. Turning his head cautiously, he saw a vague dark form behind the close-tangled green, a figure scarcely discernible in the dim light. The elk walked forward a few steps, grazing toward him, out of the shadow into more open ground. It would be better to wait, Natzoon thought, until it came fairly into the middle of the clearing; and meanwhile he would make sure just who or what this unknown neighbor might prove to be.

His keen eyes bored through the curtain of leaves, making out one detail after another as the morning light grew clearer. It was a man—no, a boy, bare-headed and wearing a fringed buckskin shirt. As the other turned his head slowly, Natzoon caught, first, a hint of resemblance, then the full knowledge that here was someone whom he had seen before. It was Malcolm Cloud, the trader's son. Natzoon easily recognized now the clean, straight profile, the grave look, and the steadily intent eyes of the boy whom he had met on that single occasion when the trading canoes had landed on the bar below the Des Moines Rapids.

The Indian boy sat very still, staring long at the unconscious face such a little distance away. Mal-

colm's expression was not even eager, it was soberly business-like, as he took long and careful aim at the distant elk. He had evidently been sent out to bring fresh meat home to the camp, and he was keenly and coolly absorbed in carrying out the task. Natzoon pictured, in contrast, the face of Chichoba and its look of fierce zest for killing, whether his quarry were beast or human. Was this the difference between the white man and the red? Not the whole difference; for Natzoon himself was not quite like either the gravely absorbed boy or the blood-seeking Indian brave.

There broke in upon his reflections a sudden dread lest his quarry should be lost to him, that, half starved as he was, he would see the elk fall to the other's gun. He made noiseless haste to level his rifle again and take proper aim for the long shot. Just at that moment, a delicately stepping deer, a doe, came through the underbrush, followed by two well-grown fawns. They passed much nearer than the open space where the elk was grazing; they stopped for a moment, while the doe looked back at her frolicking children. The two were bounding easily over logs and clumps of bushes, not as though they were seeking food, but merely as though they loved frisking in the grass with the cool dew upon their twinkling feet. The group made a close and easy target, one upon which, so Natzoon was certain, Malcolm Cloud would immediately turn his gun. He waited expectant, intending to shoot at the same instant as the other, bringing down the

elk, while the white boy contented himself with a doe or fawn.

A long minute of waiting passed, with no report of a gun. Natzoon turned his head carefully and saw that Malcolm was still aiming steadily at the larger quarry. The unconscious doe and fawns drew away into the brushy cover and disappeared unharmed. The way was once more clear for the lengthy shot at the distant grazing elk.

"Now," thought Natzoon and pulled his trigger.

The crack of his rifle was accompanied so closely by another, that the two reports sounded as one. The elk gave a great leap, then dropped upon the grass, while a terrified snort and a scurry of hoofs told of the swift flight of the doe and fawns. Both the boys jumped from their hiding places and ran to the fallen animal.

"It is mine," declared Natzoon hotly with his hand upon his knife. Almost starved as he was, he was ready to fight to the death for the prize which meant food. He measured Malcolm Cloud with his eye, a slightly bigger and heavier boy than himself, and evidently quite as hard of muscle. In his present weary and underfed state, Natzoon had little reason to believe himself a match for the other, but he was ready to do battle just the same.

"Stand back!" he cried defiantly, as the white boy came close to where the elk lay stretched upon the grass.

The other did not answer, nor did he pay any heed to the heated order given in the Sac-and-Fox tongue. He laid hold of the heavy carcass,

moved it by a great effort, and looked down at the two holes just behind the shoulder where the bullets had struck, scarcely three inches apart. Both were of the same size, nor was it possible to tell which had pierced first through that gray-brown coat.

"It is mine," insisted Natzoon. It was so that any proper Indian warrior would claim such a quarry as his own.

Malcolm nodded gravely.

"Very probably it is yours," he agreed in the odd mixture of French and Sioux which he must have learned from Milor. The Sioux tongue was so like that of the Sac-and-Fox that Natzoon could easily understand him. Malcolm looked again at the wide-antlered prize and added, "At least I am glad that I did not miss."

Natzoon was somewhat taken aback. He had expected to be obliged to struggle for his rights, and he had wondered a little whether he could prove himself the equal of this broad-shouldered lad. By old habit a flood of hot disdain went through him that the other should give way so easily. He stepped forward and laid hold of the elk's horns, intending to roll the animal over into the proper position for removing the skin.

But an elk is heavy, and a boy of fifteen who has not eaten or slept sufficiently for many days is not all-powerful. Natzoon pulled and tugged at the big carcass but could not move it. He put forth a mighty effort and felt suddenly sick and dizzy, while the trees and river danced and staggered before his eyes.

Without further word, Malcolm took hold of the hind quarters of the elk and motioned to Natzoon to lift at the shoulders. Together they rolled the carcass over and stretched it out in the right position. Then the white boy unsheathed his hunting knife and, in the most matter-of-fact manner possible, fell to work at helping to skin the elk and to cut it up.

"It is yours," he said as he began, "but an elk is a big beast to butcher alone."

They worked together in silence, Natzoon abashed and wondering, Malcolm grave, diligent, and undeniably skillful. A solemn, soaring eagle appearing from nowhere, floated overhead, waiting for his share.

When they had finished, they carried the meat and skin down to the edge of the little stream, where they made a fire and commenced cooking a most satisfactory breakfast for two healthy appetites. It was not until they were eating together in easy and friendly fashion, that Natzoon managed to find speech.

"The skin should be yours," he said shyly, "and as much of the meat as you wish. I will take only what I can carry with me for a day's journey. There is no time for me to wait until it is smoked and dried."

"That is only just," Malcolm agreed; "although I was willing that you should have it all, if you needed it." He smiled suddenly and broadly. "I never scored a hit before at quite such a long distance," he added.

"I never did myself," Natzoon acknowledged, and they laughed delightedly together. The Indian boy had not known what to make of the other's quiet courtesy; but he had an earnest desire not to be outdone in goodwill. "I will help you to stretch the skin," he said, "it is easier with two."

He was glad to see that Malcolm was a trifle less deft than himself at this task of making a framework of green willow and fastening the skin to it so that it would not shrink as it dried. At marksmanship and in use of the skinning knife, the two were practically equal; but here, at least, the Indian boy was somewhat the better of the two. The knowledge gave him confidence and banished his first shyness and embarrassment. He liked the quiet friendliness in Malcolm's eyes. It was less eager than that of the young white chief, but it was plainly evident, and it puzzled Natzoon. He had been taught to believe that any stranger was an enemy and possibly a dangerous one, yet here was a boy who treated him with immediate confidence and generosity. There is not much, moreover, which can prevent two boys who are working diligently at the same task from becoming friends. Before the skin was fastened and stretched, Natzoon's tongue was loosened, and he found himself talking as easily to his new comrade as though they had grown up together in the same lodge. Malcolm was a good listener and said less than the Indian boy, but he bore a good part in the talk, for all that. The clumsy medium by which they spoke, partly French and partly Indian, with the rest made up of nods and

smiles, seemed no obstacle at all in the way of their rapid interchange of ideas.

"It was your father," said Natzoon finally, "who told us that the Americans were coming to take from us all that we had. We are grateful to him for that warning. It is my hope to carry much the same word to all the red peoples up and down the river, that none may be deceived by the white men's false words."

Malcolm looked troubled.

"I have heard of that errand," he said and paused before he went on. "My father hates the Americans," he admitted, "and he fears their coming into this country of the upper Mississippi; for he thinks that they will hamper or stop altogether the profits of such men as himself and other British traders who come in from Canada. There has been war between those two peoples not so long ago, and men already begin to talk of there being war again, so that there is hard feeling everywhere. But—but I think these Americans are not so evil as many of the older traders like to believe."

"And the leader of that company in the big boat, do you not think that he has come with the purpose of doing us harm?" Natzoon insisted.

Malcolm shook his head vigorously.

"I am sure he wishes to be friends with you," he declared. "I think he is very brave and very earnest. Perhaps he is not very wise, at least so the men say of him; but he is trying to understand the Indians and discover the reasons why they are always at war. He stopped and talked to us for a little,

when the keel boat passed our canoes. That man from your village, Blondeau, was sitting in the stern; I could see that he was impatient to go on, but Lieutenant Pike had a long talk with my father just the same."

"And did your father think well of him?" Nat-zoon asked.

"He did not, and they had some hot words together," Malcolm confessed. "It was over selling rum to the Indians. The Lieutenant said that the Americans had made a law that Indians should not be allowed to buy it; and my father told him that without rum there would be no trade. He had to promise that he would not sell it, since the new law forbids it, but I am not sure that—that he will be able to keep his word. The Indians, many of them, love to be drunk. The first thing they ask for is always rum."

To Natzoon, the idea of a law was a vague thing indeed. Malcolm explained, not very successfully, that a law was a word spoken by that far-off person, the President of the United States, whom all must obey. Natzoon shook his head, bewildered. A man who gave orders must be close at hand and strong enough to enforce his will.

"Do you think your traders will obey the Americans?" he wished to know.

Malcolm was obliged to agree that he did not. "I think that most of the traders are quite wrong," he said, with the frankness that is only possible between boys. "They do not try to understand the Indians, they fear them and distrust them; and, on

their side, the Indians are also afraid and do not trust the traders. Many of the traders give them poor stuff, and the Indians pay them with the fewest furs they can offer. I think that the Indians and the white men each have much that the others need. I think that they can help each other and teach each other. If white men are coming to live in this new country, they will have to learn much from the Indians, before they can make anything of the newly settled lands."

"Are you to be a trader too, some day?" Natzoon asked.

"I am," was the eager answer, "and I will—will—oh, I will do far differently from all that is the custom now. I would like to give good supplies, things that the Indians truly need to make them safer and more prosperous. I would try to get their friendship if I could, and I would hope to make them glad to have mine." He stopped abruptly, as though betrayed by enthusiasm into the chance of making himself ridiculous. Moreover he was evidently not willing to say more that might seem to reflect upon his father's ways.

"And you, when you are grown, what do you intend to do?" he asked Natzoon.

"I—I will be a brave warrior, I hope," the Indian boy answered simply, "and fight the battles of my people against all their enemies, particularly the whites."

He also stopped in his turn. It had just occurred to him how little prospect there was of his returning from the strange journey which he was making, how

little need there was to think what he would do in later years.

"Will you fight against me?" asked Malcolm, grinning broadly, and Natzoon answered,

"No, not against you. But I am certain that white men and red men will always hate each other."

They had finished their work now and were stretched out upon the grass, pleasantly at ease and frankly giving the time to further exchange of talk. Their conversation, for a while, was of ordinary matters, of tracking deer and calling turkeys, and of the shy ways of woodcock. Then their speech at last began to turn toward the exchange of more intimate information. Malcolm's father, so his son explained, had gone up the trail to the Sioux village some miles away and would not return and be ready to go forward with the canoes until well after mid-day. And Natzoon, lazy after a bountiful meal and no longer feeling the spur of haste, was willing indeed to lie there and talk, as he had never had opportunity to talk to anyone in his life before.

Malcolm listened with sober earnestness, put questions now and again, seemed glad and anxious to hear all that Natzoon had to tell of the river, the Indian villages, their hunting, their warfare, their chief.

"Is it Black Hawk who has taught you to hate the white men?" Malcom asked finally. "It is known all up and down the river, so I kept hearing as we came along, that of all the chiefs, there is none so bitterly hostile to the whites as he. And he is

wrong!" he cried suddenly and vehemently. "He is so wrong that presently his mistake will destroy his people. You should not believe or obey him."

Natzoon was startled. Not believe or obey his own chief? What an astounding idea!

"He hates them with full right and wisdom," he broke out. "He will be hostile to them forever and ever, because he knows what they really are."

And, almost before he knew it, he was pouring forth the tale of what Black Hawk had suffered at the hands of white men, of the brutal indignity which had been put upon him, a warrior and a chief. He explained, in a sudden torrent of speech, just what was the debt which that proud Indian was still waiting to repay.

Malcolm Cloud sat up very straight, his gray eyes burning while he listened. He did not show much astonishment, only a slow, smouldering heat of indignation as the story went on. He sat long silent when Natzoon had come to an end, so long, indeed, that the Indian boy at last decided that there was to be no comment on what he had been telling.

He got up, a little stiffly, and said,

"The sun is mounting high, and I have spent more time than I should have spared. I must be making speed upon my journey."

Even then Malcolm was not to be hurried in what he had to say.

"Did you ever hear," he asked slowly, "of an Indian called Tauneen, the Man Who Talks with the Sun?"

"Yes," answered Natzoon. Yet he was obliged to think for a moment before he recollected that this was the name of Chichoba's father, the vanished medicine man.

"There is a certain band of Indians," Malcolm went on, "who live back from the hunting grounds along the Mississippi, in the broken country about the headwaters of such smaller rivers as the Des Moines, the Cedar, and the Oneota. They are outcasts, men with whom no tribe will have anything to do. They are warriors who have broken the laws of their own people and who have fled from the just punishment which they should have faced. Many of them are Sioux, but some are of other tribes. The Sioux call them the Washpeconte, the People of the Scattered Leaves. And amongst those people, dwells this man Tauneen."

"He lives there?" cried Natzoon. "Surely that cannot be so. Tauneen is dead; he went on a raid against the Sioux and was never seen again."

"His own people never saw him again," corrected Malcolm, "but he is alive, for I have seen him. Wabashah and I—" he broke off, seeming to recollect that Natzoon was in haste. "That would take too long to tell you," he went on, "but you can be sure of this, that Tauneen knows more of that adventure of Black Hawk's than does even Black Hawk himself."

He got up and stood with his gray eyes fixed unswervingly upon Natzoon's face, as he finished what he had to say.

"I cannot stop you, I suppose. You will carry that message of yours to all the Sioux and to all the Chippeway, if it is necessary, to the very head of the Mississippi?"

Natzoon nodded.

"Then I ask, I beg, at least that you will do one thing," Malcolm urged. "When you go to the village of Wabashah on the Oneota River, will you not travel out of your way just so far as to strike across the ridges at the head of that stream, and seek out this Tauneen and find him living in his log hut at the forks of the river where Wabashah and I found him? Will you not spend with him, not a day—no man could abide his company for the whole of a day—but at least one hour, or two, and listen to his talk? His words are very strange and evil, but there is a chance that some good might come of them if—if you could listen."

"I cannot be certain," Natzoon answered reluctantly. "My journey promises to be a long one, and the time is pressing. But, if I can, I will do as you ask." His feet fidgeted among the dry leaves, for he was in haste to be away.

The sun had risen well above the trees by now, the birds were singing in the thickets, the little river beside them was a glittering pool of sunshine, with only a riffle of current showing in the midst of the still surface. A turtle came up to bask upon a stone, and, so quiet were the two boys, it did not notice their presence but settled itself comfortably and stretched out its head and legs to enjoy the warmth.

"I should like to ask you one question," Natzoon

said. "Why did you not shoot the doe or one of the fawns, when your camp needed meat? The shot was such an easy one."

Malcolm looked unbelievably embarrassed. "They looked so—so happy," he admitted sheepishly. "I have felt like that myself, frisky, and glad to be living, on fresh, cool mornings just like this. I could not kill any one of those three."

Natzoon nodded understanding and answered with a strange and terrible confession for an Indian hunter. But he made it bravely.

"Neither could I."

Again they were silent; it seemed no easy thing to say farewell.

"I hope," Malcolm began, confused and awkwardly searching for words, "I hope that we—we may know each other more some day. I hope that, when we are both older, we might try—together—to understand, a little, this matter of Indians and white men, of how a new country should be settled without needless suffering and killing. Between us, perhaps, we might get a little further than white traders and settlers on our side and Indian warriors and hunters on yours, have succeeded in getting up to this time."

He smiled radiantly, relieved to have got into speech that which so greatly filled his heart. He held out his hand, and Natzoon, after staring at it blankly for a moment, remembered what he had seen Blondeau do on greeting Lieutenant Pike. He put his own dark hand into the sunburned one and suffered it to be shaken in cordial friendship.

He took up his gun and turned toward the river, yet hesitated, still reluctant to go. Then Malcolm, gathering courage, made one final desperate request.

"Can you not give up this journey? Can you not believe that Black Hawk is wrong, that white men are, many of them, honorable and friendly? Can you not let Lieutenant Pike and his men go forward in safety and peace?"

"No," cried Natzoon. "No, no!" He could not stop until he had given a vigorous, wrathful negative to each question. The sound of his angry voice frightened the turtle, and it dived, plop, into the still water. "What I have promised," Natzoon insisted, "that I must do. I cannot turn back."

Malcolm watched the ripples spreading outward from the stone, and then suddenly demanded with final, desperate boldness, "Would you if you could?"

"I would not," returned the Indian boy. "I am like Black Hawk; I will be the enemy of white men always—always."

He swung about and strode off upon his way. He set his eyes upon a distant wooded hill beyond the river and held them there, lest he be tempted to look back, lest he see his comrade of the last hours standing, silent and regretful, with his feet in the cold, gray ashes of their dead fire and with the brilliant sunshine coming through the leaves to shine upon his face.

CHAPTER VII

THE PEOPLE OF THE LEAVES

Although Natzoon had realized fully that there were no miles gained by undue haste, he could not, so he discovered, learn to travel at a more moderate speed. It was more than he could do to keep himself from ever pressing on with insufficient food and sleep. Thus he kept making long, forced marches until he would be driven by weariness and hunger to pause for a whole day and night of exhausted sleep, or one or two days of hunting. Sometimes game was plenty; sometimes, if he were near large villages or if a hunting party had gone through the country before him, it was so scarce that he must travel many miles out of his way to appease his famished hunger. At such times, his excited impatience knew no bounds. He understood that the keel boat was traveling more slowly, and he had been told by Blondeau that the expedition must stop for several days at the settlement of Prairie du Chien, to change into a lighter form of vessel. In spite of all this, he had, whenever his journey was delayed even for an hour, the uneasy sense that he was missing something, that some golden opportunity of watching or warning might be slipping away from him as the moments passed. He made up his mind that he could not hearken to Malcolm Cloud's

request, or give the time to seeking out that mysterious Tauneen who dwelt among the People of the Scattered Leaves.

As he faced steadily northward, it seemed that, mile by mile, the autumn was marching to meet him. The air grew fresher and more bracing; the far hills had a steadily deepening tinge of russet and yellow; the swamp maples near the streams bore single branches of brilliant scarlet. Through the woods, as he went forward, there began to drift bright multitudes of tiny, gay-colored birds, the northern warblers, taking their way southward as the cold came. The borders of the smaller streams were banked with solid sheets of brilliant yellow flowers, golden ribbons of color which wound in and out with the windings of the creeks. The hot depression of the summer was gone, and a bracing coolness had taken its place, as he covered, with his pressing eagerness, the many long miles which lay between him and the Oneota River. On its banks, as he knew, was the village of Wabashah, the Red Leaf, the most powerful chief of all the Sioux tribes.

He skirted various smaller camps with silent precaution, thinking that, in this half-hostile country, he had better seek directly the most important leader. He needed to ask no questions as to direction, for he knew the general trend of the rivers and where to look for the chief town of that Sioux band which called itself the Minowa Kantong, the People of the Lake. Not far north of their village, the Mississippi spread itself into a wide body of water, which the French explorers had named Lake Pepin.

It was a hill-surrounded, stormy place, where, so Natzoon half hoped and half feared, the white men's expedition might, without outward interference, come finally to grief by stress of rain and tempest.

He was going forward with even more than ordinary haste, as he came within the last twenty miles from the Oneota River. The woods were fairly open and had been swept so clean of game that not even a rabbit track was to be seen, not even the bold whistle of a quail could be heard through the frosty sunshine. The boy's hunger was mounting hourly, for he could scarcely remember how many days it was since he had paused long enough to procure and eat a satisfying meal. Now, so he told himself, he could not possibly take sufficient time to seek food in this bare country. He had not seen the white men's expedition for many days; he was certain that it must have reached and passed Prairie du Chien on the eastern side of the river. He would, he was sure, get word of it at Wabashah's village; and for this news he could not wait.

He came hastening into a flat, grassy clearing beside a singing brook and almost stumbled into the warm ashes of a spent fire. Some single hunter, evidently traveling from afar with deer's meat upon his shoulders, had here broken his journey home. He had kindled a small blaze, had roasted two of the ribs of the buck, and had eaten his fill. Perhaps he had slept or in some way delayed a little too long beside this pleasant resting place, for he had gone

forward in haste and had dropped the knife with which he had been cutting apart the meat.

Natzoon's quick eye caught a glint of color amongst the ashes as he passed. He stopped, picked up the dropped knife, and studied its bright, embroidered sheath. The pattern of beads and dyed porcupine quills told its ownership as plainly as though it were marked with a name.

"Sioux," he said to himself, "with the sign of the Beaver clan and with the blade worn thin. I wonder that the man should have lost it, for he must be an old and successful hunter. I wish he had dropped a rib of venison instead."

He poked idly among the ashes, but if any meat had been left behind, it had been carried away by some fox or raccoon as hungry as himself, who had left behind a few, faint footprints in the shifting ashes. The question which now became uppermost in Natzoon's mind was just how recently that stealthy animal had visited the camp site, and just how long it would take to track it down. Whatever the creature was, it ran on four legs and represented food.

Even if he had not been so intent upon this, which had so vitally to do with the appeasing of his hunger, it is doubtful whether he would have heard the noiseless step upon the grass behind him. Certainly he was unaware of any presence save his own until two huge hands seized his arms just below the shoulders, and, as he twisted about in a furious effort to free himself, he looked up into the face of a gigantic Sioux.

The Sac-and-Fox were a tall tribe and the Chipeway somewhat taller; Natzoon was a well-grown boy partaking of the height of both. But the Sioux are a bigger nation still, and this man was such a giant among his kind, that the boy was a child beside him. His great hands easily pinned Natzoon's arms against his sides in spite of his desperate struggles. The man's wide shoulders and massive body scarcely moved, and his feet did not shift their position on the ground as Natzoon fought and writhed, fainted and twisted himself round and about, in his battle for freedom. At last, as the boy stopped for a moment to catch his panting breath, the hunter spoke in his deep, guttural voice,

"Shall I wring your neck as though you were a camp-robbing jay, or shall I strangle you, as a snuffing, thieving coyote should be strangled?"

"I am no thief," returned Natzoon furiously. "I picked up the knife which you dropped, and—and—I will yet plunge it into your black Sioux heart."

"A Sac!" grunted the other. Each of the two had spoken in his own tongue, which were enough alike to be intelligible to both. "And what is one of your tribe doing here, in the hunting grounds of the People of the Lake?"

"I bear a message to Wabashah," Natzoon answered. "And you shall not hinder my delivering it."

"That I will not, indeed," replied the other, easing a little the crushing strength of his grasp upon Natzoon's arms, "for it is even to Wabashah that I am about to take you. Our chief has some strange

fancies, and one is that he is not pleased when chance strangers are slain within our region. He orders that he must first have word of who they are. So I will have the trouble of marching you to our village before I make an end of you. Our chief is a very great man, otherwise I should sometimes grow impatient with his unreasonable whims. Now, will you walk before me along the trail, or shall I bind you with thongs and take you over my shoulder like a newly-slain buck?"

Natzoon, deciding that to enter the village on his own feet would be the less humiliating mode of progress, signed that he would go forward. Whereupon the Sioux released him but first took possession of the boy's knife and gun.

"If you have come from Black Hawk's village to Wabashah's, you have had a long journey and must be weary," he observed mockingly. "Therefore, since I am somewhat the bigger of the two, I will even carry your weapons for you. We of the Sioux never take chances with strangers, not even the small Sac-and-Foxes."

Fuming, but powerless, Natzoon was forced to march forward down the small valley of the creek.

"I was as blind and clumsy as the white man," he raged within himself. "He never looks behind, but I did not even look about me."

His companion, half guide, half captor, paid no attention to the boy's sulky silence as they tramped along, but talked to him much of the great chief Wabashah. He was the mightiest chieftain of all the bands of the Sioux, so Natzoon was told, and his

like was not to be found, though one should search from the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains.

They approached the village at twilight. Nat-zoon caught sight of a line, longer than any he had ever before seen, of lodges, pitched on the southern bank of the stream, following its wide curve and marked here and there with the dotted red of fires. As they came to the edge of the encampment, his companion stopped at the first dwelling, thrust Nat-zoon abruptly within, and told the three braves, father and two sons, that the lad was to be kept safe until arrangements had been made to bring him before the chief. It seemed there was much ceremony connected with any interview in the council lodge of Wabashah.

During the time which passed before his guide returned, Natzoon was bountifully fed by his hosts. While he ate like a starved wolf, he asked for news of the white men, but the Sioux warriors shook their heads. They had heard of the expedition, but they were sure that it had not yet passed the mouth of their river. Their talk drifted, as the other man's had done, to telling of the great prowess of their leader, Wabashah.

"He cannot be a greater chief than Black Hawk," Natzoon told himself stoutly and many times.

Finally, his guide returned and, bidding the boy follow, ushered him into the council lodge. They found it dim and empty, lit only by the sparse flames of a newly-kindled fire. The big warrior slipped out just as two figures appeared among the farther shadows, the one which approached first

being a half-grown warrior carrying a long pipe with a carved and painted bowl. Indians seldom have servants to wait upon them; but this particular chieftain, Wabashah, was well known never to show himself at a council, or on any formal occasion, without being preceded by his pipe bearer. The youth put down the calumet upon two willow crutches made to hold it and, at a sign from the other, withdrew.

Natzoon, on first catching sight of Wabashah in the light of the slow burning fire, could hardly restrain an exclamation of surprise. He had expected another giant, thinking that the tales of greatness must concern a warrior of enormous physical power, bigger than any of the other Sioux. But Wabashah was a little man, a most unusual thing for one of his tribe. He had the look of great strength; but he was gnarled and knotted in a fashion quite unlike the smooth slimness of the ordinary Indian brave. In some past affray with enemy or wild beast, one side of his face had been fearfully scarred. He seemed, indeed, a strange and uncouth person until he began to speak.

His voice was deep and rolling; nor was it possible to listen to it without an inward thrill. He spoke slowly, so that the difference between the Sioux and the Fox tongues should not destroy the meaning of his speech for the stranger, and he spoke with the authority of one who knows he has the right to command respect and attention.

"Nuneska, who brought you hither, says that he found you with his knife in your hands and that

you expressed two wishes, one, to bury the weapon in his heart, and the other, to see me. Am I to understand that you have the same friendly purpose toward me as toward him?"

Natzoon hung his head. He knew that his hot temper had betrayed him; he felt that he did not make a very impressive figure as the messenger of his tribe. But his spirit was not to be quenched, even by such an adverse beginning; and he summoned courage and began to tell what he had come so far to say. The chief listened intently, asked a question here, and gave a grave nod there, and in the end drew from the boy everything which he had to tell. Natzoon even took the black crow's feather from his hair and told how it had come whirling down out of the sky to make plain the will of the gods. Wabashah continued to question him until he had led him to describe in full the deep-burning hatred of Black Hawk for the white men, a hatred whose flame Natzoon hoped to carry northward for the destruction of Zebulon Pike and his whole company. Yet the boy did not speak of the terrible hour when that flame had been kindled in Black Hawk's heart.

The Red Leaf heard him to the end and then asked,

"And is this your feeling, also? Do you share in the desire of your chief and your people, that this young white chief should die?"

"Yes!" cried Natzoon.

The Sioux chief had seated himself upon the mat before the fire, but the boy still stood before him.

Wabashah, after a little silence, gave Natzoon a piercing glance.

"You speak with unnecessary force," he said, "almost as though you were drowning a little voice within yourself which says otherwise. You have watched the young white man through all these days, you have seen him toil and suffer and care for his men and always press onward. Do you still hate him, as Black Hawk and this Chichoba have bidden you to hate him, O son of the clan of Crows?"

"I need no bidding," asserted Natzoon steadily. "I hate him as all Indians should hate all white men. Any person can see that he is a mere speaker of fair words, a coward and a fool."

"A coward—and a fool?" repeated Wabashah. "My eyes are old, perhaps, for I did not observe—just that."

"You have seen him?" Natzoon asked in surprise. The other nodded.

"I saw him at the village of Prairie du Chien, not many miles from here, where he has been staying to change his goods into some other vessel than that great, clumsy thing which has clung to every sand bar between here and St. Louis. That is the boat of a fool, I grant you, but it may be that his own chief ordered him to use it. I have not only seen him, but I have sent six of my young warriors to beg that he will turn aside from the main river and come these few miles up our lesser stream to visit us here. And he is coming; he will be here after one more sunrise."

A blazing thought ran through Natzoon, the knowledge that here, away from the highway of travel, at a place remote from the dwellings of the Americans, in a settlement where twenty white soldiers would be surrounded by a thousand or more Sioux warriors, here was the moment for that deed to be done which should end the danger to his tribe forever. It would be so easy. The other whites would never know! The flame of his idea must have lit his face and made plain reading for the sharp eyes of Wabashah.

"So," the Sioux remarked, "you are thinking that here is where the white men's journey might easily come to its final end. Would that fulfill your desire and that of your Black Hawk?"

Natzoon nodded, his eyes shining. He could not quite understand the emotion which was shaking him, as wind shakes a poised poplar leaf.

"And who is Black Hawk, that I should hearken to his hatreds?" cried Wabashah, with sudden vehemence. "I will slay the white man or I will let him pass, as pleases me. Black Hawk's ideas, Black Hawk's warnings, they are naught to me. Your chief hates the whites with especial bitterness, because he fears them. He conquered a weaker tribe than his, and he dreads always that some greater force will do the like to him."

Natzoon's temper flared into a rage which forgot all caution. Wabashah had spoken the very thought which was often present in his own heart, and, for that reason, he resented the words the more furiously.

"The white man must have given you gifts, down yonder at the Prairie," he cried, "and doubtless he has called you a great chief; therefore you will not harm him."

"He has called me only what I am," returned Wabashah simply. "And whether I be great or small, I keep my own counsel as to what I will do with that young chief when he comes to my village."

"Then," exclaimed Natsoon, "if you let him pass, I must carry that message of destruction even to the Chippeway."

"Ah," Wabashah spoke softly again, "that is why you were chosen for a messenger. I had marvelled why one should set out upon so great an errand, who is a youth of your inexperience and your—uncontrolled tongue. I have wondered at your lack of years; I have wondered still more at your lack of courtesy. Do boys in your tribe speak even to their elder warriors as you have just spoken to me, the head chief of the Sioux? But I see now why your people must needs make use of one who is at least half a Chippeway."

"Is it so plain?" Natsoon blurted out. It was one of Wabashah's strange tricks that he could startle men's thoughts from them, and, to such power, a boy like Natsoon fell an easy victim. "I cannot see," he added, "how you should know that."

"I see many things written upon your face," Wabashah answered, "but I will not read all your secrets aloud to you. And I know also—" his hesitation gave a moment of suspense. "I know also a secret of Black Hawk's, why he cherishes such bit-



"I am never to return."

ter hatred against the whites. No, boy, do not look so startled; you did not tell me, nor did Black Hawk; perhaps it was only the birds of the forest who were talking of that matter."

He was quiet for some moments, during which his wrath seemed to mount again.

"I will pledge myself to nothing in regard to this white man," he said suddenly and harshly. "I will destroy him or not, as I myself judge best. I will take no warnings from Black Hawk; you may return and tell him that."

Natzoon shook his head.

"Unless I could bring him back tidings of the white man's death, I am never to return at all. I cannot carry your message back to him."

The fire had burned very high now, filling the whole lodge with flickering light. Natzoon could at last see clearly the strange look which the other bent upon him.

"It might almost seem that Black Hawk loves you little, to let you fare on such an errand," he said.

It was useless for Natzoon to attempt to conceal any thought from the keen-eyed chief; therefore, he merely answered simply,

"No one of the Sac-and-Fox tribe regards with goodwill anyone who is half a Chippeway."

"And will the Chippeway regard you with any greater kindness?" Wabashah asked further.

"No," the boy answered dully, "I have no hope that they will."

It would have been hard to interpret the look with which the Sioux chief regarded him, in a long and reflective scrutiny.

"You have spoken such words to me and to Nun-eska," he declared with cold severity, "that it would be only according to our justice did I bid that big warrior bind you hand and foot and fling you into the waters of Lake Pepin. Should I do so, would Black Hawk ask any questions as to your fate; would he send warriors to avenge your death?"

"He would not," replied Natsoon stolidly.

Wabashah seemed to be weighing a decision, in frowning absorption. At last his face cleared, and, for the first time, he took up his pipe, filled it, and lit it with a coal from the fire.

"I will not pledge myself to do as you and your people desire," he said at length, "nor will I execute justice upon you. I will not even stop you from carrying your message to your friends the Chippeway, if it is your wish. But, to requite the words you have so insolently spoken, I will lay this order upon you. You are to travel to the headwaters of this river, find the abode of the People of the Scattered Leaves, and seek a man called——"

He stopped to puff at his pipe, which was not drawing, and Natsoon supplied the name,

"Tauneen?"

Wabashah nodded.

"That same bold warrior who would have his people believe that he was slain by our Sioux. He will come to no such honorable end, even when his time

for death finally arrives. But what is it you know of him?"

"No more than his name," said Natzoon, "and that a trader's son, Malcolm Cloud, wished me to seek him, also. But I had thought that my journey was too important for me to turn aside."

"You shall let that pressing journey wait a little," Wabashah directed. "You shall find out this man, and you shall spend at least a portion of a night or a day with him, hear what he has to say, and ponder it well. Either you will give me your word that you will do this, or else—the river shall take you and make an end forever of your errand for the Sac-and-Fox. What choice will you make?"

"I will go." Natzoon's voice sounded flat and deadly weary. It seemed to him that he had made utter failure of the whole of his undertaking. Then, since Wabashah seemed plainly to have done with him, he walked away to the entrance of the council lodge. He looked back, as he reached the door, not to say any word of farewell, but merely for a final look at this strange man who had so puzzled and impressed him, who had guessed so many thoughts and yet had so completely hidden his own. The chief was puffing at his pipe, and the light of the fire was dancing across his face. Natzoon, in wondering surprise, could have sworn that the great Wabashah, so wrathful a moment ago, was smiling to himself.

He slept in that same lodge to which he had first come, and in the morning he was supplied with a store of dried meat and set upon his journey under the unwelcome escort of Nuneska. What orders the

giant warrior had received from his chief he did not reveal, but tramped beside his charge mile after mile, still retaining possession of the confiscated gun. They traveled slowly, hunting a little as they went and sleeping in reluctant company by the fire when they made camp at the end of the day.

"How far are you going with me?" Natzoon asked, as Nuneska made ready to set forth with him the second morning.

"As far as Lake Pepin, where we are to wait until we see the white men pass," responded the other and stalked away ahead of him along the trail.

The chill of an unwelcome thought crept slowly through Natzoon. Was it Wabashah's purpose to sink him in the cold waters of the lake after all, he wondered. Should he try to escape; could he hope to win through the forest with no weapon save his knife? Could he indeed elude the pursuit of his giant guide who was, so Natzoon had been told, as fleet-footed as he was big? All these questions went in and out of his brain for the whole of the day that he tramped at Nuneska's heels. And the answer to them all was a certain sense within him that, somehow, he could trust Wabashah as a man of his given word.

Late upon the afternoon of the third day, as they toiled through a dense wood, following a path which seemed visible only to Nuneska's eyes, they came suddenly out upon the edge of a bold bluff and looked down upon a wide reach of river, encircled by high hills and with, almost opposite them, the

valley of the Chippeway River opening through the bluffs.

Was this to be the end, Natsoon thought. Was it his own journey, not that of those others, which was to come to its conclusion in the tossing waters of the great river? He stepped back a little from the edge of the cliff and made ready, at least, to give Nuneska a bitter struggle, even if it must be an unequal one.

The great Sioux, with a gesture of mock courtesy, handed Natsoon his gun.

"I was to bring you far enough on your way to meet the white men once more," he said, "and yonder they are."

He pointed to where a flock of white, just entering the foot of the lake, indicated the approach of a vessel smaller than the keel boat and sailing easily before a brisk wind. It was followed by another of the same size, these being the bateaux in which Lieutenant Pike was to pursue his voyage beyond Prairie du Chien. As the two stood watching, the Sioux was giving to the boy certain directions as to his further journey. He was to leave the main river, follow such and such a valley, cross a ridge and reach the forks of the Oneota River by such and such a route, and there find the dwelling of Tau-neen. Afterward he could strike northeast, looking for certain landmarks, and he would come once more to the higher reaches of the Mississippi, above the Falls of St. Anthony. Here, also, he would come again upon the trail of the American expedition.

Natzoon was listening with only a small portion of his mind; for he was watching the two boats as they came well into the river-lake and stood on their course upstream. Then he turned at last to speak to Nuneska and found that he was gone.

The narrow lake was a cradle for sudden storms and afforded at best a perilous passage, on which many a canoe had been wrecked. There was a superstition which vaguely mentioned certain evil spirits abiding in the lake, and which said that the stormy waters could be passed safely only at night. A certain fear of marauding enemies had something to do with the origin of this idea; for it was here that the hunting grounds of the Chippeway touched those of the Sioux, and here southward-drifting bands of the forest dwellers came down to do battle with their ancient enemies, the men of the plains. But Lieutenant Pike evidently feared neither ghostly tales nor hostile warriors. Ignoring the far-off lightning play of a coming thunderstorm, he had raised mast and sail, and, borne by a rising wind, he voyaged easily the whole length of the lake, which ordinarily required so many weary miles of paddling. Natzoon, too far behind to need concealment, stood upon the high headland and watched them pass. They sped safely on their way, aided by one of the unaccountable moods of the river, which seemed, for the moment, to be all smiles and friendliness to the white men.

This was the last time that Natzoon was to have sight of the Americans for very many days. Henceforth, he was to strike across country to seek, by the

shortest way, that strange man, Tauneen. By the request of one person and by the command of another, he was to find out this vanished member of his own tribe and "hear what he has to say." For Malcolm he felt something like real friendship, and for Wabashah he had begun to have reluctant respect, while concerning Tauneen himself he began to entertain a burning curiosity. Would this half-unreal person have advice to give concerning that puzzling problem, the difficulties between white men and red? Was there any way in which the fire of hatred between the two could be quenched save by the shedding of blood, enough blood to drown the most consuming flame that men's hearts could hold? And if there were some other way, would this man of the forest be able to tell him how to find it? Natzoon was not certain of the answer to any of these questions; and, meanwhile, since he must carry out his own appointed task, he felt that he must press on with renewed haste. As his path turned away from the river and took him westward into the prairie country, there were beginning to be lines of geese marking the sky overhead. It was plain that the autumn was to be an early one. Here was one more reason for hurrying forward.

He was traveling now over rolling plains, which were yellow-brown instead of green, upon which scattered buffalo were cropping the last of the summer grass and antelope were darting across the trampled buffalo trails, their coats matching in color the dusty shade of the dry prairie. Fruits and berries were ripening in the patches of woodland along

the streams, quail were gathering in flocks, and flights of pigeons were going past overhead in streaming clouds. Sometimes he journeyed through a country of brown grasses and of yellow-leaved cottonwoods beside the streams, sometimes through groves of scarlet and orange sugar maple and pale gold birch trees. He had never seen birches before. The rolling swales of the prairie began to rise into hills. This was the north country at last.

He began looking for such landmarks as Nuneska had specified, a great fallen tree with its head in the water, an abrupt bend in the stream with a big, red boulder holding back the force of the hurrying current.

He was sure that he must be very near to his journey's end, when he finally lay down to sleep one night by a quiet pool near the headwaters of the Oneota River. It was a still evening, but with a gray sky in which the stars were hidden and with a raw chilliness in the air which made the ruddy flame of the campfire a welcome companion.

He awoke at midnight feeling the sting of cold rain upon his face. He got up and attempted to stir his fire into new life but did not succeed, for the last coal had been quenched into wet ashes. All about him he could hear the harsh rattle of falling sleet, and the slow roar of a rising wind behind the wooded ridge. It was impossible to be still under the lash of that icy rain, so he took up his gun and wallet and set forth upon his way. The wind was blowing straight against him, and the sleet was like steel whips upon his face and shoulders. He

struggled forward, hoping to find some cover under an overhanging bank or a jutting rock. But no shelter offered, and he stumbled on, blind with the beating of the icy tempest all about him, guiding himself by the sound of the river which he could hear but could not see. He was on the point of giving up his search and of sitting down in weary misery to await the coming of day, when he caught sight of a far-off light.

Afterward he learned that he had chanced to see it far up the valley, where two points jutting into the stream from opposite sides just afforded space for a view between them. As he pressed forward, the windings of the river cut off the sight of the distant glimmer again and again, so that it might have been a will-o'-the-wisp which he was following, so provokingly did it appear and disappear, seeming ever more distant, the more he hurried toward it. Yet it served as a guide and as a point toward which to persevere with dogged hope, through a long, struggling journey. The blackness of the sky above him was giving place to gray, even through the sodden clouds, when he came toiling up a slope and saw, in the dim light, a rude hut made of logs, mud, and branches, and roofed with bark. The light which he had followed so long was streaming through a square hole in the wall.

There was no door, merely an opening hung with a buffalo hide, from beyond which came the sound of voices, as though the place were full of people. He hesitated a moment, not having bargained to meet more than one stranger; but, since he felt

more than ever that he must tarry only the briefest possible time, he pushed aside the leather curtain and went in.

The space inside was small and mean, with far less of comfort or cleanliness than the poorest lodges in his village might afford. There were a few, sorry mats, a few old, rusty kettles, a broken bow, and a quiver half full of warped arrows. There was, moreover, a wilderness of other odds and ends, fans of eagle feathers, pipes carved with sacred symbols, bags of colored earth, and sheaves of painted sticks. These curious objects, so Natzoon knew, were the properties with which a medicine man carries out his prayer ceremonies and incantations, and they lay scattered about the makeshift fireplace of flat stones, as though some such sacred rites had just been finished. It seemed to Natzoon, as he came in, that the red and orange flames of the blazing fire were the only things in that dark place which were clean, wholesome, and familiar. As, from beside the stone hearth, a crouching figure turned to look at him, the boy felt suddenly that he was in the presence of something evil. The voices which he had heard were silent; he knew now that they had all come from this one man.

Tauneen had once been big, but his shoulders were stooped, his long arms bent, and his great hands, like the talons of an eagle, were crooked and knotted. The boy had seen old men in such a plight before, all pulled awry and made helpless by some strange stiffness, born of long winters of cold and long years of hunting in wet seasons as well as

dry. The old medicine man had a vast brush of iron-gray hair and a big-boned face with hollow cheeks and deep-set eyes.

"Have you brought food with you?" he asked abruptly in a whining, husky voice. "I have eaten nothing for three days."

Natzoon opened his wallet and took out the last of the dried meat which had been given him at Wabashah's village. He had guarded the final remnants for some emergency, but he could not keep them now; for this man who was in such want was a member of his own tribe. Tauneen devoured them like some ravenous animal and looked up eagerly for more, but made no complaint when Natzoon shook his head.

"My gun is broken and my foot crippled," the man told him, "and such an accident as that means death unless chance sends a friendly passerby."

He explained that when he was hunting three days before he had fallen over a rock and that, as it rolled against him, his foot had been crushed and his gun had been so bent and wrenched that it was useless.

"And my stiff and twisted arms will never pull a bow or fling a spear again," he said. "So I could do nothing but crawl back to my lodge and make prayers that some help might come. Yet I could see little hope, for it is only once in long months, or even in a year, that a trader passes this way. Thus, long before I could get another gun I should be dead by starving."

"And do these men who live near you, the People of the Leaves, give you no help?" asked Natzoon.

The medicine man shrugged his big shoulders.

"I have taught them, long since, to have naught to do with me," he said. "We are not friends. What have they, those skulking, murdering Sioux, to do with Tauneen, the Man Who Talks with the Sun? Should they chance to learn that I am unarmed and hurt, they would be here in haste, to settle old scores. There would be no fear then of my dying of hunger. No," he grinned mirthlessly at the thought, "I would go more quickly than that, amid the fire and smoke of my own flaming lodge."

"Then why do you still live near such evil men?" asked Natzoon.

"Could I live with my own tribe?" the other demanded in his turn. "I am an old man, I have no secrets now. I see that you are of my people, and I hear my own tongue spoken; but I care very little how you came here."

He seemed to slip away, for some moments, into wandering fancies of his own before he came back to explain matters further.

"On that raid against the Sioux of which you may have heard your warriors tell, I fell into a quarrel with a comrade, and, in my anger, I turned upon him just before the enemy broke from cover, and—I killed him. The Sac-and-Fox braves thought the Sioux had slain us both. I have drifted here and drifted there, and at last have come to this country of men, like myself, who cannot dwell among their own people. But I will not be one of them——" he

added fiercely. "I am their medicine man; I make prayers and spells for them; since every band of Indians, even we, must have its medicine man. The People of the Scattered Leaves are far away from the world and do not know its stories; they hate me only for what I am, not for what I have been."

Natzoon said no more; he was lost in the wonder of why both Malcolm Cloud and Wabashah should have wished him to come to this place. His only thought now was how soon he might go away again. Certainly not until the storm had somewhat gone by; but not one moment beyond that would he abide in the lodge with so evil and despicable a thing as Tauneen.

The Indian boy's silence had no effect upon the words of the old medicine man. It seemed that from long living alone he had developed a hunger for talk; and it mattered little who was his hearer, if only he had opportunity to pour forth upon him a torrent of speech. Now and again he wandered in his words, so that the boy did not catch his meaning. Yet Natzoon comprehended enough to realize that the man was telling, sometimes in a great, boastful roar, sometimes in a droning whine of complaint, almost the whole story of his life.

When he had first left his tribe, he had allowed himself to be hired as part of a keel-boat crew, so he said, with a band of white men who floated goods from the frontier settlements on the Ohio, down that river to the Mississippi, and on to the Spanish towns on the Gulf. When the voyage was over, the boat would be broken up and sold; and the

crew would tramp back over the long miles overland to set out upon a new journey. A strange and terrible company they must have been, these who were Tauneen's comrades, men who did not scruple to rob when they were poor, to plunder when they were hungry, and to burn when resistance was offered to them. A scourge of the frontier settlements they became, as they traveled that long way on foot, living by marauding and hunting and caring not at all what tale of desperate deeds they left behind them. The boy had heard stories of cruelty and revenge amongst his own people, but never anything so heartlessly terrible as this. He knelt there beside the fire, warming and drying himself, but hungry and weary and bitterly aghast.

"You need not tell me more," he broke forth at last, when Tauneen had for a moment paused to take breath. "I have already learned from Black Hawk how cruel are all these white men of whom you know so much."

"Black Hawk!" The old man gave him a leering smile, which had in it something of triumphant pride. "Who should know better what we could do, than Black Hawk? But I would not have you misunderstand me, boy. These men in whose company I fought and toiled, there was none other like them for spirit, for boldness, for taking what pleased them, and for giving battle to those who resisted."

He sighed, as he thought of their past glories, and continued,

"They are all dead, those comrades of mine. They were of the sort to whom a new country gives op-

portunity, with its scattered settlements and its lack of rulers. There was one among them, Jan Mendell, the boldest of them all, the man most after my own heart. He dwelt here with me for a little; his own kind also would have no more of him. He was the only one who was ever my match in reckless daring; and he is dead, slain a year ago by a giant Sioux warrior of Wabashah's band. He was killed below Prairie du Chien, and some news of his death drifted back to St. Louis. The American chiefs asked some questions in the matter, I hear, but the Indian and his tribe were never punished."

Natzoon was less interested in this Jan Mendell than in another name the man had mentioned.

"You were telling me of Black Hawk," he said.

"Yes, yes, of Black Hawk, the strutting, prating warrior who became chief in the place which should have been mine."

He launched into so long a tale of the abuses, wrongs, and jealousies between him and his rival, that, in the end, Natzoon's attention wandered. The continuously sounding voice made him sleepy, and he nodded a little beside the fire as Tauneen went on and on. Once, when he roused himself, he saw a peering face at the window, which looked in as though to view the crippled man's plight, saw that he had an armed companion sitting with him beside the fire, and silently disappeared again, letting in the dull light of a stormy morning.

The medicine man took no note of those prying eyes at the hole in the wall. He was talking probably as much to himself as to his drowsy listener.

It may have been that the injury to his crushed foot, bound up in a dirty bandage, had filled his blood with fever and that the incoherent speech was partly delirious. It became more and more difficult to follow, nor did Natzoon attempt to take in all that the man was saying. Then, suddenly, he was startled into wakeful interest once more; for here at last they had come to the heart of the whole matter.

"I had told my comrades of Black Hawk, who thought himself better than any other Indian and more than the equal of any two white men. The southern range of his tribe's hunting grounds touched some of those trails by which we marched back up the river, and my good friends had promised me that, should we ever fall in with the young chief, we would teach him a lesson."

Natzoon swung about with his back to the fire.

"Had Black Hawk ever done them any wrong?" he demanded.

"No, they had never seen him; he had never even had a brush with the whites at that time. But I had told them enough of him and of his raging pride; and they felt that it would be the finest thing in the world to teach him something of the strength of white men. And I, how I had longed to harm him in any way I could! We had our chance, ah, we were lucky indeed, we had our chance!"

He paused, smacking his lips over the recollection, and then continued.

"We were floating down a small river in some canoes which we had taken from one who did not

dispute possession with us. I was hunting ahead, and at a turn in the stream I saw an Indian asleep upon the grass beside a deer which he had killed. I showed the others how to come near without a sound, so that we were upon him at the instant when he awoke. It was only then that I saw that it was Black Hawk. To catch an Indian—and a chief—asleep, that is a trick that white men alone could have accomplished. A famous joke it was. I have laughed over it a hundred times since, all alone here in my cabin in the woods.”

Natzoon had no need to ask what happened then; indeed he wished that he could have closed his ears to the tale of how Black Hawk had been held and beaten, while the white men jeered and mocked, and while Tauneen remained under cover lest he be recognized. And how long the medicine man dwelt upon the story! It seemed that this was his favorite of all the black and ugly memories which he had carried with him into solitude.

Finally, however, he appeared to be weary of speech, as though the strange pleasure of emptying his evil mind to a chance passerby had satisfied him. He dropped into what seemed to be a muttering doze, awaking to ask the boy more than once,

“Are you sure that you have no other food to give me?”

Natzoon’s mind was fairly staggering under the weight of this new light upon past events. Here he had stumbled upon the cruel cause of Black Hawk’s desperate hatred for the whites, a cause just enough in itself but, none the less, no real reason

for his being turned forever against all white men. Natzoon burned with anger at the brutal indignity which had been laid upon his chief; and yet, in turn, he felt the anger give way to a reasonable belief that not all white men should suffer for the wrongdoing of this jealous and unbelievably evil man, Tauneen.

"Tell me," he said sharply, after a long space of time filled only with the medicine man's mutterings, "tell me, to how many have you told this tale of your adventure with Black Hawk?"

"I do not know; I like to go over the past, both when I speak aloud to myself and when I have the chance to talk to some passing stranger." His voice trailed into silence; he seemed to have spoken all his thoughts and to have little interest in further talk.

"But I must know," pursued Natzoon relentlessly, "did you give the story of this matter to a certain chief named Wabashah?"

"Aye, that I did. It was less than a year ago when Wabashah was thinking of making war against Black Hawk, and I thought the tale would make that curious Sioux chief laugh. He had passed this way in company with a white trader and the trader's son, a boy of much your age. I did not like the lad. When I had done the tale, this half-grown cub asks me with a great, long face, 'Have you ever thought how many white men may die for this joke of yours?' A strange, solemn fellow, the boy! And Wabashah said nothing at all. I could not make him laugh even with such a fine story as this."

There was silence again in the cabin, while each of the two followed his own thoughts. It was broad daylight now outside, and the rattling voice of the sleet had ceased. In its stead, soft-fingered tapping on the window told that the icy rain had given place to snow. At last Natzoon was free to go. He had carried out Malcolm Cloud's request; he had obeyed Wabashah's command. He had spent the required number of hours in this man's company; certainly he had heard all that Tauneen could have to tell him.

He got up. Tauneen who had been watching him with quick, side-long eyes, suddenly made a great leaping effort and sought to snatch the rifle from his hand.

"Give me that gun," he cried, "or I will slay you."

Crippled as he was from his accident, stiffened by the rheumatism which had twisted his powerful joints, feeble from the long years of evil living which were behind him, he was no more than a pitiable spectacle as he made his last attempt at robbery. His guest merely stepped aside, to avoid his staggering reach, and stood looking at him disdainfully, as he stumbled with a groan against the wall.

"I do not wonder," observed Natzoon, "that the People of the Leaves hate you; I cannot see why they should fear you, or why they should be waiting for you to die before they burn your cabin about your ears."

He took two strides toward the door and then stopped. The man did not protest; he merely crouched against the wall, still staring at the rifle.

"I am of your blood," he whispered huskily. "Would you have me die here, at the hands of the Sioux, outcast Sioux, whom even their own warriors will not abide? Shall a Sac-and-Fox perish thus; shall I so end my days, I who was a chief's kinsman, a great medicine man, Tauneen, the Man Who Talks with the Sun?"

Some strange impulse, born, perhaps, of his very loathing of this despicable man, took possession of Natzoon. He could not bring himself to be, even in the smallest measure, like him in selfishness and cruelty. Before this, he had calculated his chances for life in that forest without a gun and had judged them to be very small. But, in spite of that, scarcely knowing what impelled him, he stepped across the room and put rifle, bullets, and powder horn into Tauneen's trembling hand. Without listening to the other's stammering words, he stepped outside and dropped the buffalo hide behind him. He was glad indeed to draw a long breath of the fresh, cold air. How fair and silent and clean the forest seemed, with its soft snow falling, as he strode away from that house of evil things! How glad he was when the thick, white curtain hid it quickly from his sight.

CHAPTER VIII

KINNIKINICK

Lieutenant Zebulon Pike had traveled far since the day of his leaving the heat and quiet of the encampment under the cottonwood trees just outside St. Louis. He had not only passed over miles of river and forest; he had also made long steps forward in experience and knowledge. He looked back upon the person that he had been three months ago as someone so ignorant and untried that it could hardly be himself.

At every stopping place, at every opportunity to talk with the stolid, red-skinned men and women who came down to the water's edge to stare at the newcomers, he made deeper and more earnest efforts to understand these strange people. He learned that they kept their thoughts and feelings so thoroughly hidden away from white men that there was no chance in the world of guessing what was going on behind those immovable copper countenances. He saw hundreds of Indians; yet, since they all regarded him with the same set expression, he felt tempted to fall into the error of thinking that all red men looked alike.

"But at least," so he thought afterward, as he pondered the whole matter of his acquaintance with the red men, "at least I could know Wabashah among a thousand."

He had first seen the chief at the village of Prairie du Chien and had observed him walking in solemn majesty, with his headdress of buffalo horns, with his gay blanket, and with his long, decorated calumet carried before him by his pipe bearer. Wabashah, on their being presented to each other by Blondeau, offered to the Lieutenant only that sober, unmoved look which the disappointed young man had seen on every Indian face. The chief had spoken only grave and guarded words, while Pike, baffled by the steady resistance to all his efforts toward friendliness, had made little attempt, this time, to exchange more than the most commonplace talk with this solemn person.

Maurice Blondeau was taking his leave of the boat's company, since preparations were finished for the exploring expedition to set out in its new bateaux. The Frenchman regarded the young Lieutenant with narrowed, smiling eyes and would have said merely,

"I wish you good luck and a pleasant voyage."

But Zebulon Pike was not yet willing to let him go.

"There are many things which you know and I do not," he said. "I wish I could have learned more from you in these few days of our voyage together."

"It is I who have learned much from you, Monsieur," returned Blondeau. "I will tell you truly that, when first I set out with you, I was, in my heart, making light of that hope of yours for making peace with the Indians. Since I have seen your untiring earnestness and zeal, I wonder—I wonder

whether you are so wrong as I had thought. But still, I think that you cannot succeed."

He was turning away and then suddenly swung round once more to speak a thing which he had plainly meant to keep back.

"You might have succeeded, had it not been for a—a certain thing."

"And what is that?" the Lieutenant demanded sharply.

"There is a certain message of ill will which has followed you, or has run ahead of you, ever since—your first effort to make friends of Indians. I may not tell you more; but I think, sometimes, that you have felt that hostile spirit pursuing you and making useless your kindly words and your professions of good faith."

Pike stood looking reflectively at the ground, turning over in his recollection a hundred small incidents which witnessed the truth of Blondeau's words.

"I have felt it, indeed," he answered at last. "Is there no way that I can shake it off, no speed which will carry me beyond it?"

Blondeau shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

"It is well known that no man can travel so swiftly as to outstrip lying rumor," he declared. "If you are to win success in this venture, it must be because you are strong enough to disprove those whispered words, which say that you are the enemy of all red men."

The young Lieutenant sighed deeply.

"Can a man prove anything to an Indian?" he said hopelessly. "And tell me this one thing, Blondeau, does an Indian ever laugh?"

"Among themselves they laugh much, Monsieur," was the reply. "But an Indian never allows himself to laugh save in the presence of a friend or an equal." Seeing how cast down was the young officer's face, he added, "The matter would not be so hopeless if you could make a friend of Wabashah. He is the greatest of all the Sioux chiefs."

"Wabashah!" Pike repeated. "He was but like all the rest. I have made a friend of no one, and he, perhaps more than all the others, said only solemn words which meant nothing."

"He could do you either great good or great harm," Blondeau warned. "No man understands him. I wish that he could be your friend, yet I bid you beware of him."

And with this, he finally took his leave.

Wabashah's sharp glance, however, had examined carefully the look and manner of "the young white chief," and his keen mind had taken that man's measure. The Sioux chief had departed from Prairie du Chien to his own village, well before the setting out of the Americans. But as the new bateaux were ascending the Mississippi in a steady and dreary downpour of rain, they were met by a delegation of six of Wabashah's warriors, who stated that all was in hopeful readiness, at their encampment, for a visit from the white men, and who begged that the expedition would ascend the tributary river and visit their council lodge. Although

time seemed pressing, although he had so far met with nothing but ceremonious and meaningless speeches at these councils, Zebulon Pike, with unflagging enthusiasm, turned his boats aside from their course, rowed up the river, and disembarked at Wabashah's village. There was no lack of elaborate formality at the meeting on both sides. The banks of the river were lined with much decorated and little-clothed warriors. The white men in the boats honored the occasion by firing a salute of three rounds with blunderbusses. The Indians returned the salute, making an attempt to discharge their pieces all together, as the Americans did, but succeeding very badly. As they knew of no such thing as blank cartridges for salutes, the guns sent bullets whistling in a score of directions, splashing in the water all about the boat and making the ceremony an exciting affair as well as an impressive one.

The leader came ashore, garbed in full uniform, as he had been for the benefit of the Sac-and-Fox, but carrying, under the gold-laced coat, a far less hopeful heart than he had borne to that first meeting with the assembled chiefs. He had stuck both his pistols into his belt, and had not only girded on his sword but had made sure that it was loose in the scabbard before he stepped out of the boat.

He was conducted to the council lodge, where a place of honor had been prepared for him, with a new mat of white deer's hide to sit upon and a cushion of bearskin stuffed with wild-goose feathers, behind it. Just above his head, swinging from a cut-off branch of the lodge pole, hung a magnificent

war bonnet, a gorgeous thing with a high, scarlet crest and a long trail of painted eagles' feathers, blue, yellow, red, and black. He glanced up at it, then looked fixedly at the chief's face and seemed to read, in both, the silent statement, "It is as fighting men that the Sioux have won their fame."

There was much ceremonious eloquence to which the Lieutenant, strongly tempted to weary disbelief, listened with little interest. Yet when it was his turn to speak, he once more put forth his bravest efforts to assure his hosts of the regard of "their white father, the President of the United States," and of his own great desire that Americans and Sioux might be allies and friends.

He sat down amid a curiously baffling silence, and the pipe of ceremony was handed about. It was filled with tobacco which Pike had brought, and was passed from red chief to white, from dusky warriors to the three soldiers who had come with their commander to the council house. Then followed a banquet, of which the Lieutenant made ready to partake politely, although there was every reason to expect that the principal dish would be boiled dog. It was, perhaps, the best possible proof of Wabashah's observation and tact, that the big wooden bowls, when they were brought, proved to be filled with wild rice, maple sugar, and venison.

There was afterward a medicine dance, and then came the general presentation of gifts "from the great President of the United States to his excellent friend, the Chief of the Minowa Kantong." The soldiers spread out a generous store of tobacco,

knives, vermillion, and salt, which made many a copper face shine with delight as the bags and packages were opened.

Wabashah regarded the heap of riches with dignified reserve and said,

"These are fair gifts, but they must come freely. Our men are not beggars; we do not ask for them."

With equal gravity, Zebulon Pike assured him that the gifts were, indeed, a mark only of the respect in which so great an Indian chief was held by the White Father. The other bowed his head and made a sign, whereupon the lesser chiefs and warriors arose and went out of the council lodge, leaving Wabashah and Zebulon Pike alone, except for the chief's own interpreter, a Sioux who could speak sufficient French for Pike to understand.

The American officer watched his host closely, wondering what was to be the purport of this private interview. He was very weary of long and high-sounding speeches, weary of choosing his own words so carefully, and of wondering whether any of them had been believed. He saw the chief filling the carved green bowl of his pipe, and, following his example, Zebulon Pike brought out his own small, black one, companion of some of his evenings by the fireside. He smoked rather seldom, only when special occasion offered. His pipe was a comfort at moments of great weariness; it was also an element of sociability when he was in company with others. As he was about to fill the bowl from his worn leather pouch, Wabashah motioned him to wait. The chief took a small quantity of tobacco

into the palm of his hand, then, producing from inside his blanket a bead-embroidered bag, he shook out an equal amount of the Indian's tobacco, made of the inner bark of the red willow. He mixed the two together and extended his palm to his guest. This combination, so he indicated, Pike was to set alight in his own pipe.

"Kinnikinick," he said gravely. It was the Sioux name for their willow tobacco.

The young Lieutenant stuffed his bowl full, lit it with a splinter from the fire, and began puffing comfortably. The red-willow bark would have no more strength or flavor than dried leaves, he felt sure, but he would make a pretence of smoking it to please the old chief. Neither spoke, since both seemed equally tired of eloquence. The clouds of smoke drifted slowly upward in the complete silence of the lodge.

Presently the Lieutenant began to be conscious that something odd was happening to him. The curls of smoke became giddily numerous, the gay ornaments which hung from the lodge poles all about him, the bright blankets, the painted shields, the huge war bonnet of many-hued feathers, all seemed to be swaying and swinging together. Then the ground beneath him seemed to tilt, and the whole lodge, with the dull glow of the fire at its centre, began to revolve slowly about him.

With a great effort, he looked steadily at Wabashah's face, at the bright, black eyes set in that baffling, unwinking, Indian stare which he had seen so often. Was there, so he wondered within his

whirling brain, the ghost of an expression beginning to cross that deeply-lined countenance? The ground seemed to slant more steeply, so that he caught hold of the nearest lodge pole. For some reason, the only clear thing remaining in his mind was Blondeau's parting speech concerning Wabashah, "I bid you beware of him."

The utter absurdity of his defenseless state was almost too much for Zebulon Pike's gravity. Yet he preserved as much as he could of unshaken dignity and continued to watch every move of the chief sitting opposite him. Suddenly the solemnity of that face cracked into a thousand smiling wrinkles, and Wabashah of the stately presence was heard to utter a slow, deep chuckle.

Pike had been told that an Indian does not permit himself to laugh save in the presence of a friend or equal. Could that dry chuckle be interpreted as laughter, and had one Indian at last extended friendship to him? Yet he had spent so many unavailing words in his attempts to win some sign of goodwill from all those stolid, copper-faced chiefs with whom he had held converse, that now, on account of his reeling head and his discouraged heart, he made no effort to speak.

Wabashah rose from his place and himself drew back the hanging deerskins from the door of the lodge. The clean, fresh air came rushing in, driving out the smoke and the smell of that potent drug in the red-willow bark. Zebulon Pike made an effort to get up also, that he might move nearer the door and fill his lungs with the freshness that they

so greatly needed. But even more than ever the ground tilted, the painted inside of the lodge cover swung round and round about him, and he was forced to sit down again. He was quite helpless, and he was, moreover, alone in the midst of he knew not how great a number of enemies. His head began to clear enough for him to be conscious of danger. Every move, however, proved his dizziness to be so great that he knew that he could not walk even so far as the lodge door. He regarded Wabashah intently, with a look as steady as his own. The chief came slowly nearer and stood before him.

"Every Indian, save those hidden in the farthest northern woods, has something to tell of his knowledge of white men. I, too, know a little of them, of which I would now speak to you. The tale which I have to give you is this,

"A year ago, there was a white man slain in the Sioux country; he fell by the hand of a certain warrior of my tribe, whose name is Nuneska. The white man was very evil and well deserved his death. Presently there came word, through the traders, that the White Father in St. Louis had heard of the matter and demanded that we bring the murderer to him to be judged. I said to Nuneska, 'Will you go with me, to try the justice of these Americans, or will you go away to dwell among the People of the Leaves, while the whites send a band of warriors to punish the whole tribe for your deed?' And Nuneska, who is a brave man, said that he would go. We took two others, who had seen the circumstances of the white man's end, and we journeyed in our

canoes many days, until we reached the abode of the high chief who is called the Governor, in St. Louis.

"We came to him in a great council room, where the floor was like still water and where a fire burned in a hole in the wall. We talked to him long through our interpreter, and we told him truly and plainly that our warrior was an honorable man and had slain only to preserve his life from unprovoked attack. We were asked many questions as to just how this thing and that thing had occurred, and when our answers all ran truthfully together, the white chief said at last, 'The deed was no murder, and the Indian goes free.' So we came back again and lit long fires of rejoicing along the river and danced many dances to our gods. And we believe, now, that some white men are evil and some are just and wise, even as is true among our own people."

Zebulon Pike heard him steadily to the end, his brain growing slowly more clear as the minutes passed. When the chief brought his narrative to a close, the Lieutenant looked up and suddenly caught upon his face an expression unmistakably like one which he had seen before. Short, gnarled, and wrinkled as was Wabashah, there was something in his bold features which brought back remembrance of that tall, free-striding youth whom Pike had seen before General Wilkinson's house, and whom he had heard to utter those shrewd words concerning President Jefferson and his hopeful purchase of the valley of the Mississippi.

"Can a man buy running water?" Even the sound of that younger, richer voice was like Wabashah's.

"Have you a son?" Pike asked abruptly; and he saw a look of delight spread over the old chief's face, as he nodded.

"He is not here. I sent him upon a mission to St. Louis, that he might see and ponder the ways of white men. Did you see him? Did you mark him? Did you not think that he promises to be a good leader and warrior?"

"It seemed to me," Zebulon Pike answered, "that he had something of his father's wisdom as well as of his father's face. You may well be proud of such a son, who will, I suppose, some day lead your people in your place."

Wabashah shook his head.

"I cannot be certain that he will hold my place; it must be as our tribe wills and as he deserves. Time brings as fitful changes as those which are wrought by wind and water, and no man can hope to say that this thing or that thing is to be after him. He can but seek a little wisdom and a little courage and do his best in his own day."

He had spoken all of this through his interpreter and now gave the man an order in his own tongue. The other disappeared from the tent, but in a moment returned, bearing a slim bundle wrapped up in deer's hide and tied with thongs. This Wabashah opened and brought forth a long pipe of ceremony, a calumet with a stem at least four feet in length and a bowl of the dull-red pipestone which could

be carved by skillful hands with all the intricate signs and symbols pertaining to the red men's religion. From the gaily painted stem hung four strings of wampum, which swung and glittered in the firelight as the pipe was laid down upon the crutches before him.

"This is my message which you shall carry to the northern Sioux, that they may see that we have smoked the peace pipe together, and that it is my desire that they also shall make peace with you. Each string of wampum is for a different band, so that all may know what is my wish. I have thought long over this matter of red man and white, and it is my belief that the Mississippi is a big river and that she has room upon her banks for us all."

"Black Hawk thinks otherwise," declared Pike, studying Wabashah's face for the effect of his words.

"For Black Hawk I have little love," returned Wabashah curtly. "He is one of those who looks only backward toward the past, who does not take thought of the new things which must come. There was a time when the men of our race were few and toiling and always in danger. We have horses now, and guns, powder and blankets, steel knives and axes; so that our power as hunters is increased a hundredfold, and we fear neither cold, hunger, nor our enemies, as once we did. Can we close our eyes to the knowledge that, with these things which the white men have brought, the white man's changes must come also? Some men, who look only into the past, believe that we can take all the good, and then turn to fight against the white men and destroy

them. Let Black Hawk and his warriors go their way and let me go mine. The passing moons will show which of us has the greater wisdom."

"And will those tribes which dwell near to you think as you do of the coming of the white men?" asked Pike.

"Beyond that river which we call the St. Peters, dwell the Chippeway, and of them I can say nothing, save that they are hostile to us and to all strangers. And in those same forests, there are traders who are white men, but who have a different chief from yours, who dwells far beyond the sea. These men, I think, feel toward the Americans as we feel toward the Sac-and-Fox. They were not at war with them—now; but they are ready to exchange blows or even to shed their blood, if the need should arise."

"With your own people," said Pike, "with those bands of Sioux who hunt between this river and the River St. Peters, I am anxious to treat upon my way. It is the desire of my chief to buy from them certain lands near the mouth of the river, lands which we may call our own, without feeling that we have driven the Indians from them against their will. They shall always hunt and fish upon them as they wish; but these certain miles of forest and river bank my chief wishes to have as a place where white men may dwell with complete right."

Wabashah gave a nod of understanding.

"I heard something of that plan spoken of, when I was at Prairie du Chien. It is with the more northern Sioux chiefs that you must treat in that matter, with the man whom the French traders

call Le Petit Corbeau, and with Tahamie, the Rising Moose. Show them the peace pipe which I am giving you and tell them that Wabashah desires you to have your will. And you may tell them, also, that he wishes that a certain young white warrior, in spite of his pale skin and his fair hair, were one of his own braves, who could sit by his campfire, could take counsel with him, and could help him battle against his enemies."

The old chief's voice shook as he said the last words. Zebulon Pike, stunned and confused that Indian friendship should have come to him at last, could only look at him not knowing what to say. When at last he attempted to stammer some words of inadequate gratitude, Wabashah held up his hand as though bidding him be silent.

"It is little that I can do for you," he said gravely. "I wish for peace between white man and red, but whether it can endure or not, I do not know—I do not know. Now that I have seen and understood what manner of man you truly are, it is my purpose to do all within my power to bring about your great desire. Those of my own nation who dwell to the north of us will all do my bidding, for a little time. While I live, white men in the Sioux country shall always walk safely. After I am gone, who can tell?"

Thus came to an end Zebulon Pike's interview with Wabashah, the Red Leaf, with the only man whom he had met who seemed to have given any thought or any real understanding to the difficult problems concerning red men and white.

As the expedition left the village on the Oneota River, as it dropped down to the Mississippi and resumed its way northward, there became evident the fact that Wabashah's influence was far-reaching and that his expression of goodwill was of powerful value. The peace pipe, which the chief had given to Pike to carry, was a potent talisman, seeming to dispel those clouds of distrust and hostility which had, heretofore, hung heavy upon every meeting which the Americans had held with any of the Indians. Lieutenant Pike was received, as he went forward, sometimes with open goodwill, more often with a certain evidence of misgiving and timidity, but never with that unrelenting enmity which he had once met everywhere. He reached that river which was later to be called the Minnesota, and held council there with the chiefs of the northern Sioux. There was some doubt and reluctance evident in the words and faces of those men to whom he put his requests; but the general opinion among them plainly amounted to this, "If Wabashah says that it should be so, then it must be done."

Even amongst the Sioux chiefs who came together to treat with him, there was not complete harmony. He could feel this even through the interpreted speeches at the ceremonious meeting, when the chiefs arrived in all their bravery of feathers and war bonnets, as the Sac-and-Fox chiefs had done. Foremost amongst them, as Wabashah had said, were Le Petit Corbeau, a hook-nosed, sharp-eyed Indian of no very great stature, the Rising Moose, big, silent, and morose, and L'Ou-

tard Blanche, the White Wild Goose, a lesser and younger chief who was shy and awkward in the company of white men; yet who seemed to be a young man of great influence. The first day of the meeting passed with tolerable satisfaction to everyone, and with a promise that by the next day they would have consulted among themselves and would be ready to give the strangers an answer to their request for a purchase of land. And yet, as the meeting dispersed, the Lieutenant was aware of certain rumblings and mutterings which foretold trouble to come. He questioned his interpreter but received no very reassuring answer.

"Nothing, sir, nothing, at least, that I could make clear to you," he said.

With this, he was forced to be content; yet he went to his tent and waited for the morrow with great misgiving.

CHAPTER IX

THE FOREST SILENCE

The next morning, Zebulon Pike was aroused abruptly at dawn. There was a great tumult outside his tent; then the flap was pushed aside, and there rushed in the chief, Le Petit Corbeau. The man was excited and incoherent; he had dropped all pretence of his stolid manner of ceremony. Pike, sitting up, in blinking astonishment, upon his camp bed, and the chief, leaning breathlessly over him, both exclaimed at the same moment,

“What has happened?”

The excited Indian carried something wrapped up in his blanket, which he presently produced and showed to be an American flag with a broken staff, the same which had flown at the bow of Lieutenant Pike's bateau. Before he could explain how it had come into his possession, the curtain of the tent was thrust aside again and another Indian came hurrying in, that lesser chief, the White Wild Goose. He also, in a voluble stream of Sioux, appeared to be asking what had occurred. For some minutes, the three exchanged questions and explanations, but, since the Lieutenant spoke in English and the other two in their own tongue, save for a few words of lame French which Le Petit Corbeau could muster, the conversation did not arrive at any very sat-

isfactory end. Finally Pike summoned his interpreter and, through his means, attempted to discover what it was that had so agitated the two Indians.

It seemed that the flag pole had been snapped off by wind during the night and that it, with the flag, had floated away down the stream, a fact which the sentry had made ready to report to the commander as soon as he should be awake. The banner had drifted down a whole mile of the river and was first espied by the sharp eyes of the White Wild Goose.

"We two were upon the shore," this Indian explained to Pike, "and we saw something of a blue and red color moving with the stream. When we had brought it out and had found that it was the white man's Great Medicine, which we had all seen set up like a totem in the bow of his canoe, we were sure that some terrible thing had happened to you. That would be a great misfortune, for while you are in our country, you are in our safe-keeping. Thus has Wabashah's message gone forth to us all."

"If any harm had befallen you," said Le Petit Corbeau, "there would be an angry reckoning to be made with that chief whom we all hold in such great respect."

They both were wreathed in smiles as soon as they discovered that the Great Medicine had floated away through a mere accident, and that all of the white men were safe.

"Ask them to tell me," said Pike to the interpreter, inquiring more in idle curiosity than for any deeper purpose, "how those two happened to be walking abroad together beside the river bank so early in the morning. I had noticed yesterday that they were not upon the friendliest terms."

The two chiefs looked at each other sheepishly. The White Wild Goose, tall and ungainly, was disfigured by a badly cut lip, while Le Petit Corbeau had a battered look most unlike his sleek magnificence of the day before. For a few moments, they attempted stammering explanations, of which the interpreter could evidently make nothing; but at last the White Wild Goose decided that he could not do otherwise than tell the complete truth.

"We—we were going to kill each other," he confessed, "or, at least, one was about to have the life of the other, for the sake of insults which had been exchanged. It was merely a quarrel between our two selves, not a matter of any feud between our bands of warriors. So we had gone out to settle the affair alone where no man could see. We—we did not have time more than to begin, before we saw your totem in the water."

"And then," put in Le Petit Corbeau, "we forgot all about the quarrel, for we wished to see what had happened to you." He looked up at his awkward and embarrassed companion; his small eyes twinkled, and he added, "I think it were well that we should put off that combat until another day. I find that I can no longer be angry with you since

we have run together over this long mile to find if the white man is safe."

They went away quite peaceably, and Pike prepared to finish his negotiations with a lighter heart than he had felt at any time so far. His gratitude to Wabashah was very great, although all that he had received from that chief was a little understanding and some appreciation of his overtures of friendship.

When the treaty concerning the land was completed, the boat set forth again, in raw, chilly weather, which told that winter was not very far away. The passage over the Falls of St. Anthony was not difficult, for there were many willing hands to help in portaging their property and their bateaux. But Le Petit Corbeau, who was the last to bid them farewell as they set off northward, uttered certain words of misgiving as Pike stepped into his boat.

"There is much white water between here and that cradle of the Mississippi, which you say you are seeking. You have before you a greater task than you believe. There is no more dangerous thing than to seek to make your way against this rushing river through the forest and through a hostile country, when you know so very little. We will look long and eagerly upstream in the spring, watching for you to come safely back to us."

"I will pass here again before the snow flies," returned Zebulon Pike cheerfully; but the Indian only looked incredulous and said,

"You do not know the ways of the forest or of the Chippeway. But you will soon learn."

It was indeed a heartbreaking journey. Rapids and riffles, narrow stone trails over which to carry their goods and their heavy boats when the river became impassable, then rocks and swift current and roaring rapids again, such were the unchanging features of their highway into the north country. Zebulon Pike's heart had ridden high at the thought that now they were coming nearer and nearer to the source of the great stream, that she would presently yield up that secret which so far she had whispered to no American. Yet the river seemed resolutely determined that no interloper should force that knowledge from her; she fought fiercely and unrelentingly against his progress; she poured down her rushing waters to drive him back; she turned and twisted and confused the way, hid herself in lakes and marshes, and baffled him at every turn. Nevertheless he pressed resolutely forward, although sometimes the day's journey was no more than a scant half-dozen miles. His boast about returning before the snow flew was quickly proved futile; since he had been upon his northward journey scarcely a week before he awoke one morning to find the ground blanketed with white and the river running full of ice. The forest was growing denser on both sides of the stream, while the leafy, tangled woodlands of poplar, elm, and sugar maple, of birch, and oak, and hickory were now giving place to the more open, columned reaches of fir and pine.

The party struggled on, although cold and wet and inadequate food were causing distress and sickness to a greater and greater degree. Yet it was strange to see how men who had shirked and grumbled through the earlier and easier stretches of the journey, now bent to their far more difficult tasks with uncomplaining courage. Dangers of every kind were closing in about them in that snowy, silent forest, so that they must hold together and stand by their leader, or else must perish.

A time came when it was too evident for further denial that the heavy bateaux could be forced no further, and that so great a number of the men were sick and exhausted that a halt must be made. After due pondering, Lieutenant Pike decided to leave the greater portion of his company behind and to press on with a handful of the most able men. So far, they had not been openly molested by Indians, nor had they had any brush with those British traders whose establishments were scattered through the forest. But the very fact that the Indians came near only to peer and spy, and that the traders obviously wished for no intercourse with them, made it evident that they were in an even more hostile region than that through which they had passed before. It was necessary, therefore, not only to build huts of logs, as more permanent quarters for the men than tents, but to surround them with a stockade and to lay in an abundant supply of such game as they could gather. Thus, a small garrison might be prepared to withstand a siege, if necessary, and would be ready to offer protection, in case the ex-

ploring party must fall back upon them in the face of active enemies.

New boats had to be constructed, dugouts of the same model as those used by the Indians, but clumsily made, since there was no person accustomed to the woods to give even a word of advice as to the best methods of going about the work. The first boat which was finished was too big for practical use, and the second sank the moment it was put into the water. Zebulon Pike, none the less, went on with his preparations, undismayed, girding his courage and his determination the more stoutly, as disappointments and difficulties increased. He had the men hew out the planks for some rude sledges, so that when the river was frozen solid, they could drag forward their canoes and their supplies upon the ice. The stock of provisions which he had brought with him had dwindled to dangerously small proportions; he had lost much of his gunpowder through accidental wettings; yet of these hindrances he took little heed. He was bound that he would find the birthplace of that giant river; he was determined to summon the British traders to a reckoning with his government. Unless these two objects were attained, he felt that it mattered little whether his journey ended somewhere in the depths of the silent, snowy forest or whether the long, difficult trail should lead him back again.

He had now too much experience to believe, since he saw no Indians, that there were no Indians about him. He hunted much and very far afield, for upon his skill depended most of the chance for addi-

tional food. Many times he would find, when he doubled back suddenly on some path, which he had broken through the snow, that the footprints of three or four pairs of moccasined feet had followed his own. Yet he never caught more than a fleeting glimpse of swiftly moving, dark figures slipping away amongst the trees. He had the feeling that his every move and his every action were observed and reported amongst his enemies, that all his blundering preparations and mistakes were marked by some one, with disdainful watchfulness; nevertheless he blundered on. His single spirit was upholding the courage of all the men. He knew that if his own determination wavered, even for a day, destruction by cold or hunger or lurking enemies would rush in and overwhelm them.

He set forth with the newly built canoe, with his sledge and a meagre proportion of supplies, to make his final march toward the end of his journey. Sergeant Kennerman had been left behind in command of the stockade, while Corporal Bradley, the interpreter, Rosseau, and three other men made ready to drag the sledges and canoe, and to go forward just as far as their leader should bid them.

They came one evening to a barren waste, where fire had destroyed a broad sweep of forest and where a heavy blanket of snow covered everything. They had made scarcely half the distance which Pike's most guarded hopes had counted upon for an average day's journey. As they sat beside their fire, he took out his book and pen and tried to record just what had been accomplished. The men were talk-

ing amongst themselves, as they hugged the warmth; the quill was moving more and more slowly in his hand, and a great wave of despondency and failing spirit was creeping over him. Bradley and a comrade, thinking, probably, that their commander was not close enough to hear above the crackling flames, were talking of General Wilkinson, that idol of Zebulon Pike's youthful admiration. Weariness had loosened their caution and their tongues, and they were telling tales of the General such as the Lieutenant had never heard before, stories that bore the stamp of truth but which also gave witness of cowardice, treachery, and greed for money, beyond belief. The two had drawn a little together and were looking anxiously, from time to time, at their superior officer; but he, with his eyes upon the page, gave no indication that he had heard them.

"There is nothing the General will not do, there is no ambition he does not reach for, if only it will bring him gain," Bradley was saying. "He has his hopes turned to the southwest now; there is gossiping talk going through the whole army that he is plotting to lay hands upon that whole region, and that it will not be under any such rule as that of President Jefferson. What the army whispers one day, the world knows the next. There is a little, quick man, Colonel Aaron Burr—do you mind him? He was on General Washington's staff about the time of the Monmouth Battle and then, presently, was our good George's aide no longer. He was sick, so they say, but I think it was our honest George

who was sick of his company. Burr and General Wilkinson are the closest of friends; they are hatching something that amounts to more than anyone believes."

"And do you think," here the other man spoke very low and jerked his head almost imperceptibly toward their commander, "do you think old Windbags is going to make use of *him*?"

"The old fox would make use of anybody who would serve his ends," returned Bradley, "and he knows how to make even honest men work for his interests without their knowing what they are about. There was a little talk leaking out from headquarters, that, if we came back from this expedition, we were to go into the southwest to see how lies the land there. I, for one, will follow the Lieutenant anywhere, even if it is a rascal who is giving him his orders to go."

The second soldier got up to mend the fire, and the conversation broke off and turned to other things. Zebulon Pike closed his book and took up his gun and powder horn.

"I am going out to see if I can find a deer," he told the men, "and it may be that I will tramp so far that I will make camp alone and not come back until morning."

He walked away into the snow, for, weary as he was, he felt that only action could win him escape from the evil and depressing thoughts which were bearing his courage to the ground. Little Pluto jumped up from his place and came padding along in the snow behind him.

Pike trudged doggedly onward, making no real effort at looking for deer, but simply battling with his own thoughts. He was discouraged almost to the point of desperation, weary, homesick, and sick, also, to the very heart. It seemed that his single strong and happy thought, his loyalty and admiration for his commanding officer, had now been quenched and blackened by the undeniable truth of the soldiers' chance talk. Had not Pike himself heard General Wilkinson say those last words which had wafted him on his journey, words which had not been meant for the young officer's ears, "If he comes back, he can be made of great use."

He could not help recalling the hard, feelingless tone of the General's voice, and it was that memory which drove the final truth home to him.

"If he comes back——"

Would it not be better that he should never come back at all? What had he gained by his long labor, his eager hopes, and his earnest desire to establish good feeling with the people who dwelt on the banks of this great Mississippi? One old chief had spoken to him kindly; a few others had, at that man's bidding, reluctantly done what he desired. He thought of that treaty by which he had bought land, and went over in his mind the boundaries of that property as the chiefs had specified them, the headwaters of a creek here, the crest of a ridge or a grove of birches there; it sounded like the outlines of a child's playground rather than the terms of a treaty between two nations.

Could the minds of people who thought in such vague and indefinite terms ever be bent to the real understanding of white men and their ways? If he had accomplished so little with them, what of the inhabitants of this region in which he now traveled, where he had not yet managed to have speech with a single one, white or red? Could he make progress against the determined hostility of the British traders and of the Indians who had been urged and held to the same hostility? And would he ever find the beginnings of that Mississippi which had fought and baffled him, which had helped him a little upon his way, only to confuse and mock him in the end? Could any man lift up his spirit in the face of such disheartening odds? How he longed for Michael Tryon, for a comrade-in-arms of whose love and loyalty and steadiness of purpose he had no single doubt. Michael had foretold that he would be needed, and certainly his young commander had sore need of him now. He stood still for a moment, and Pluto came wagging up beside him and thrust an inquiring nose into his hand, as though to say,

“At least I am here.”

Zebulon Pike went on, since the cold was too great for anyone to stand quiet without freezing. He made determined effort to summon his courage again, and set himself at least to attend to the purpose for which he had left the camp. He began to scan the ground with more observing eyes, and almost immediately he crossed the sharp, daintily-marked footprints of a deer.

It was a long chase; but skill and determination and a pressing need for food brought it at last to an end. He finally caught sight of his quarry standing and looking back toward him at the edge of a clearing; and a long shot brought it down to lie before him upon the snow. He began to be conscious of his aching weariness, as he set to work to remove the skin and cut up the meat. But the task had to be accomplished, and he struggled through it to the end. As he worked, he heard soft footsteps in the snow round about him, and, glancing up once or twice, he saw the green, shining eyes of wolves waiting and prowling through the dark.

"You shall have your share presently," he told them aloud. One bold leader was so impatient and stole so near that he was obliged to shoot at it to drive it back amongst its waiting comrades. Pluto crept close to him and whimpered in shivering terror.

He carried away that portion of the meat which he and the men could use, and left the rest for the wolves to feast upon. After he had covered perhaps one-fourth of the distance back to his men's camp, he found the burden so heavy and the snow so deep, that he decided to bivouac for the night in the shelter of a close-growing pine grove. With unhurried care, he built himself a fire of fat pine knots, which leaped and flared, casting red light far abroad amongst the dark pines.

"No wolves will come close to such a beacon as that," he thought, as he prepared a windbreak of fallen branches and spread his blanket beneath it.

He cooked himself a portion of the deer meat, fed Pluto, and ate plentifully himself, before he should lie down to sleep. He took out his pipe, filled and lighted it, and smiled a little as he did so, at the recollection of his experience with Wabashah's kin-nikinick.

Almost immediately, however, the whole force of his depression came crowding back upon him, laying hold of his weary spirit with devastating power. Of what use was it to anybody that he should struggle a few miles farther in the cold and snow, make a little more effort to finish what seemed a profitless task? It was no cowardice of his own which brought about such faltering of his usual hopefulness; it was only the final result of many disappointments, of ever-growing weariness, and, finally, of the vast, lonely silence of the forest. He battled as best he could against his sense of hopeless failure; he reminded himself that the lives of his men depended upon him, that his soldiers would go whithersoever he led, and that, in spite of all the discouragements in his own heart, he must not lose courage, he must bring them safely home. Yet even his bravest effort seemed to win no victory against the overwhelming odds of his despair. He bowed his head upon his hands and sat listening to that most mournful sound in all the world, the howl of wolves across the snow.

Some one was coming softly along the white-floored aisles between the tall pine trees, some one who stumbled with weariness and could press forward only by keeping unswerving eyes upon the fire.

At first, Zebulon Pike thought the sound of feet was merely of wolves or of other lurking wild creatures. He did not raise his head until the footsteps came steadily through the snow and a tall Indian boy stepped out of the shadows into the orange light of the flames. Pike could see that he was not full-grown, in spite of his sturdy shoulders and long figure. He was so thin that the skin on his face was tightly drawn over the bones, and his eyes had the fierce glitter of starvation. The man noted that he had no gun, that his only weapons were a knife and a rude bow, hastily made from a crooked bough and strung with a thong cut from his deer-skin shirt. He noted, too, that the boy wore a battered black crow's feather thrust into his braided hair. He observed, also, to his surprise, that little Pluto, usually reserved in the presence of strangers, greeted the newcomer with the casual friendliness due an old acquaintance. He was, however, too much absorbed in taking note of the boy's starved condition to pay much attention to the action of the dog.

The two looked at each other without speaking; then Zebulon Pike, with grave courtesy, offered him what had been left from his own supper and set about cooking more. He had never seen such wolfish hunger as that with which the boy ate, although he observed that the other took the precaution of consuming only a little at first, then waiting for a space before helping himself to more. But when he did eat, he devoured the food as one who had,

through force of starvation, come to death's very door.

The Lieutenant gave him water melted in his tin cup, which the boy took without a word, drank off, and filled up with snow, that it might be melting again.

"Usually they ask for rum," Zebulon Pike commented within himself.

He did not know what to make of his strange guest; but one thing was so simple and evident, that the boy was famished to the point of grave danger, that there was no question of what was to be done. For two long hours, he worked and tended him, feeding him at intervals, giving him his blanket to wrap about his benumbed limbs, replenishing the fire again and again, that the life-giving warmth should not fail. The boy said absolutely nothing. He ate greedily, seemed to doze a little, then woke to eat again. Now and then a great wave of shivering would go over him, and he would crawl closer to the fire and draw the blanket more tightly about him. His big, dark eyes would search the white man's face again and again, and occasionally his hand would go out to stroke the black head of Pluto. But the long struggle to bring the lad back to life and strength went forward without a word being exchanged.

At last his hunger seemed to be in a measure appeased; the food and warmth seemed finally to have established some measure of vigor in him again. He took from his belt a small bag containing a bone awl and the strips of leather without which

no Indian goes upon a journey. Moccasins are short-lived footgear; they wear out again and again, and must be repaired and renewed at frequent intervals. The moccasins which the boy wore were cut and torn almost into ribbons, but he fell to mending them with patient persistence and, after long effort, had made them once more wearable. It was as he sat stitching busily in the firelight that there began finally to be some effort at talk between them.

"Sioux?" Zebulon Pike said inquiringly, but the boy shook his head. "Chippeway?" he inquired again.

This time the boy made a gesture which Pike did not understand, and followed it with a sign which seemed to indicate, in pantomime, an animal running.

"Sac-and-Fox," he declared huskily.

His hearer looked his astonishment at the boy's statement. How could an Indian of that tribe have wandered so far north? Again the other made the same signs, and, after long reflection, Zebulon Pike got an inkling of what he was trying to tell him. He made an experiment in French.

"You are partly Sac-and-Fox and partly Chippeaway?" he asked, and the boy nodded eagerly, seeming to be pleased that his pantomime had been understood and appearing also to understand the French words.

The Lieutenant studied him long and in silence. His own depression of spirits seemed strangely dispelled. It was not only because he had been

laboring so vigorously in behalf of another; it was also from his being oddly conscious that he was in the presence of respect and admiration. The regard of another had revived his perishing confidence in himself. There was some wordless meaning in the long, steady looks that the boy occasionally gave him, which warmed the white man's heart and courage. And yet a vague memory began to drift into Zebulon Pike's mind, something of what Maurice Blondeau had hinted to him, a recollection of the feeling that hostility was running ahead of him on the feet of some unknown messenger. The Indian had finished mending his moc-casins and had bound them on again before the white man addressed him once more.

"What are you doing in the north country?" His voice rang loud among the trees, for he had spoken with resonant emphasis.

The boy gave him a glance, a strangely mingled look, which combined defiance with the evidence of many other feelings. His mind seemed to fumble with the effort of expressing himself, but he presently put his answer into fairly intelligible French.

"I am here about the business and the safety of my people," he said. Then, like the flitting shadow which he had been when he came, he slipped away out of the firelight and was lost in the darkness.

CHAPTER X

HEART-OF-FIRE

As Natzoon fared forth into the cold and dark, his heart was stirred with a hundred strange emotions. He had thought, as he went struggling through the forest, that his journey had come to its end. Without his gun, and in a strange country, he had been able to shoot down next to no game, for the makeshift bow had been of scarcely any use. As he grew weaker, he had been unable to shoot anything at all. The strain of long travel, combined with his present extremity of starvation, had now made his spent mind waver in a delirium of exhaustion and hunger. At times, the forest seemed empty of any living creature save himself, slowly crawling forward at a pace which got him nowhere; at times, it seemed full and crowded with running and leaping animals or with flitting ghosts and spirits which pursued and surrounded him, always moving from tree to tree as he stumbled along. He had only one thought—to stagger as far as he could go, before he fell exhausted and let death take him. That purpose for which he had set out had dwindled now into the single idea that he must go on.

The light of the fire, shining at so great a distance, had at first seemed to him only one of the ghostly or goblin things which were visions of his

bewildered brain. But at last its reality stamped itself upon his mind, and he began to struggle toward it. Without its light, he would have given up his long effort and have dropped exhausted into the snow. When he came near, he did not at once recognize the man who was sitting there in the unsteady light of the flames. It was not until Pluto's warm tongue touched his hand, not until he felt the familiar soft silkiness of that curly coat snuggling against him, that he began to wonder vaguely just who these two were and began to grasp the idea that here was the enemy whom he had followed so long.

And that enemy was warming him and feeding him, had wrapped his own blanket about his shivering body, was arranging the pine branches to shelter him from the wind, was giving him the water which he had made ready for himself. The white man was regarding him kindly, was speaking to him in a voice of quiet friendliness.

"Chippeway?" he had asked, with cordial interest rather than dark suspicion that this newcomer should belong to a tribe of threatening foes.

Natzoon was moved to answer him quite frankly, to explain, by such means as he could, to just what nations he belonged by that mixture of the blood of two warring Indian tribes. His iron strength revived quickly through the medium of warmth and food and kindness. He knew that he must go on as soon as he was able. Nevertheless, he lingered, basking in the light of the fire, in the cordial affection of little Pluto, and in the ready friendliness of

Pluto's master. His mind cleared, and astonishing thoughts began to rush through it. He would have liked to stay with these two forever; he would have liked to serve that man and give him honor and loyalty. He knew that he must go on, yet he loitered over the task of mending his moccasins, so that he might prolong to the utmost the first real happiness which he had ever known. Yet he could see that suspicion was gathering in the heart of the white man. When Lieutenant Pike had asked him with emphatic meaning what he was doing here, he answered with an immediate flaming up of defiance and had forthwith departed into the shadows.

He was able now to push on with steady strength and to know his way by certain landmarks with which he had long ago become familiar by hearsay. He knew that his mother's father, old Shawonoe, lived close to Thunder Lake, and he had long known from her accounts just how the land fell and how the rivers ran in that region upon which her heart was always dwelling.

With his renewed vigor, he was able now to knock over a chance rabbit or partridge by means of his clumsy arrows, although he still traveled hungry and with very brief intervals for sleep. He saw at last a great white rock standing upon a hill amongst the pine trees; he saw a round marsh, like a cup, through which a stream ran; and he knew that just beyond it he would find the little, rush-filled lake and the village of his mother's people.

He came to it at last, a huddle of birch-bark lodges half buried in snow, with a gray wisp of

smoke drifting from the top of each and lifting unevenly in the wintry wind. He made his way to the largest of the group, raised the moose hide from the door, and, without ceremony, stepped inside. Old Shawonoe, a keen-faced Indian, but stooped and wrinkled, and with hair as white as the snow without, was sitting beside the fire.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

Natzoon replied in that Chippeway speech which up to now he had never spoken to any person in the world save one.

"I am the son of your daughter who went to dwell with the people of the Sac-and-Fox."

Shawonoe bent upon him a look which was all too familiar, that look of suspicion and doubt which Natzoon had seen hundreds of times on the faces of the people of his father's tribe. Since he was not all Sac-and-Fox or all Chippeway—because he was neither the one nor the other—no man ever trusted him. Reluctantly and harshly Shawonoe questioned him further. Why had he left his own village to come into the north country?

For the first time, Natzoon was unable to speak his errand. That message of hostility and warning which he had carried from village to village, amongst the Sac-and-Fox and the Sioux, now died upon his lips. He was here in the land of the Chippeway, in that region of tangled forests, of confusing streams and hidden marshes, where, so he had always known, was the proper place for the white man's journey to end. And these darkly hostile Chippeways were, beyond all other people, the tribe

whose hands would most ably and willingly bring about that necessary destruction. But, although he opened his lips to tell Shawonoe of all these things, the words would not come.

A thin, cracked voice spoke from behind the Chipewaway chief, and an indescribably ancient squaw came out from the shadows of the lodge into the light of the fire. An Indian woman looks old when she is twenty, she is bent and wrinkled and haggard by the time she is forty, and this thin wisp of a squaw must have been well over eighty. She was Shawonoe's mother, the great-grandmother of Natzoon. She looked like some ancient, cracked, and antique doll, with only her small, bright eyes seeming to be alive in her withered face.

"If the boy is of our blood, he should be made welcome," she declared; "we have all too few young warriors in our village, and this one has the look of a good hunter and fighter."

She set food before him, dried wild rice and a very few scraps of meat; she kept peering at him as he ate and muttering things to herself concerning that granddaughter of hers, whom she seemed to have loved dearly and to have mourned deeply, when the young girl followed her heart into her lover's country.

Natzoon, for a day and a night, did nothing but sleep long and heavily in Shawonoe's dwelling beside the lake. The birch-bark covering did not serve to keep out the bitter cold, as did the stout buffalo hides of the lodges of his father's people or the logs of their warmer winter huts. The food,

also, which his great-grandmother alone seemed willing to prepare for him when he awoke, was very meagre and of a sort to which he was not used. Muskrat and raccoon meat were not like venison or buffalo steak. Presently, however, when, as a great treat, the old woman brought him out a tiny portion of dry moose meat and he tasted it, with its wild, gamy flavor, he decided that the Chippeway did not always fare so much worse than did the more southern tribes.

After Natzoon had rested himself the whole of one day, Shawonoe announced harshly that if the boy was to remain in his lodge he must make himself of some use.

"Shall I go out to hunt?" asked Natzoon. "You must lend me a gun; I have none of my own."

Shawonoe answered with a snarling refusal. His own gun, heavy and ancient and most unreliable, was nevertheless such a treasure that he would never trust it in the hands of this intruding stranger.

"No, I have other work for you than that," he declared. "There is a pack of furs to be carried to the traders' establishment two days' journey to the northeast. You shall take them thither and bring back the goods which the trader will give you for them. Bear them very carefully. There are enough prime beaver skins to bring us back a three-point blanket, and powder and bullets for our next season's hunting."

He gave Natzoon careful directions as to what course he was to follow and let fall, also, a chance remark.

"There is news that the white men who are traveling northward through the forest, will make their way most certainly to this establishment of the man M'Gillis, who is the chief trader of all this north country. Mark those strangers well, if you should see them. I am curious to hear what they are like and how those who call themselves Americans are different from those who name themselves as British. White men are white men and seem all the same to us, but it appears that they differ among themselves by tribe and tribe." He grinned unamiably. "They do not seem to love each other more deeply than the Chippeway love—the Sac-and-Foxes."

It was his great-grandmother who made sure that Natzoon had provisions to carry with him upon his journey, and who gave him snowshoes to bear him over the drifts. His father's people did not make much use of the racquets which carried men so easily over the snow, but he had seen them before, and he found it not at all difficult to manage the new footgear which added so greatly to the ease of walking. Recurrent storms had drifted the snows deeper and deeper, until now, even in the open and level places, a man must struggle midhigh deep, unless he had means to travel over the light crust.

Just before he set forth, the ancient squaw slipped a further packet under his arm and came out before the lodge to say to him, where Shawonoe could not hear,

"This is a roll of marten skins. Your grandfather has grown old, and when he gives over his furs to

the women to be tanned, he is sometimes confused as to the number which are given back to him. With these you should be able to buy a gun from the trader, and have enough left for at least one handful of powder and a score of bullets. You are of our blood; I cannot bear that we should send you unarmed into the forest. And when you reach the trader's stockade, have a sharp eye for a certain Indian of a few years greater than your own age. Sagona. He is a kinsman of yours; he is in the service with the trader for hunting and trapping; he is a jealous and hot-tempered youth and might well make trouble for you. Now go. May the spirits of the snow and the storm lie sleeping while you make your journey."

After all the hardship which he had encountered, Natzoon found this new errand not a very difficult one. The pack of furs weighed heavy upon his back, but the way through the pine-clad country was open, and the snowshoes bore him easily over the ridges and valleys of the drifts. He put many miles behind him on his first day's journey, slept in a little camp under a rock, and rose with the first winter light to go forward again. His accurate observation of landmarks showed him that he was well advanced upon the way.

By midmorning, however, the sky grew dark with heavy, sweeping clouds, and a wind, with huge, threatening voice, came rushing through the pines. Very soon after, it began to snow with hard, sharp crystals of ice, which cut and lashed as they flew before the storm. The blast was straight from the

north and was, luckily, not directly in Natzoon's face. It blew across the line of his course and threatened, many times, to drive him aside from the unknown way. Even had he known the features of the country, it was hardly light enough for him to see far through the whirling downfall. He struggled stoutly on, following the long valley of a little stream, which proved to be a faithful guide. It was at a time that should have been sundown, when he finally saw a dark mass looming before him through the blinding wind, stumbled against a high log palisade and felt his way to a gate, where an armed sentry, after a little parley in Chippeway, decided to admit him.

The enclosed space which he entered contained several buildings, blockhouses, warehouses, quarters for traders and hunters, and a long hall with open rafters. Hither Natzoon was conducted and given a place before the huge fire which roared in an enormous stone chimney. There must have been thirty men gathered within the log walls, Indian, French half-breeds, and a small portion of those who were truly white. At the far end, where a platform was raised a little above the puncheon floor, stood a table, and beside it were grouped the three white men who were evidently the leaders of this motley company.

The man who had brought him in, a Chippeway half-breed, told him in an undertone that the very tall, sandy-haired man, with the big shoulders and great knotted hands, was Hugh M'Gillis, who had the whole establishment in charge. His slighter

companion, with the dark hair and a darkly tanned skin even in this midwinter season, was Monsieur Grant, who, under M'Gillis, had the care of one of the branch trading houses near Lower Red Cedar Lake.

After the interpreter had gone up to announce the newcomer's arrival, Natzoon was brought before these two masters of the place. His pack was opened, and his furs examined and counted.

"Shawonoe knows how to hold back his wares," commented the man whom the half-breed had indicated as Monsieur Grant. "He is not like the others, who send in their furs for trade at the moment when they are most plentiful. But I think it is that shrewd old squaw, whom I have seen in his lodge, who dictates to him when and how he shall offer them."

He had spoken in English, but the Chippeway half-breed, who seemed to be governed by a zealous sense of hospitality or else a desire to show off his knowledge of languages to a stranger, translated into Natzoon's ear just what the man had said. The other, M'Gillis, now spoke in such good Chippeway that there was no need of the offices of the eager interpreter.

"You are not an Indian of this district," the trader said, "and yet you look to be a Chippeway."

"I am the grandson of Shawonoe," the boy told him, "yet, until now, I have dwelt in a far country."

M'Gillis looked at him steadily. Natzoon had seen blue eyes before, the gray blue of Malcolm Cloud's, the deeper shade of Zebulon Pike's, but he

had not before seen such eyes as these, dark, sparkling, Scotch blue, a color different from all other eyes in the world. They seemed to take in every detail of his outward appearance and also to read no little of his heart. He, surely, was the man to whom should be told that errand of hostility against the Americans. But here again Natzoon stammered and then stood dumb, unable to frame the fateful words. Yet it was as though M'Gillis were helping him to state the message which he had carried so far.

"You have come on a long journey," he said. "Have you heard anything as you traveled northward of a certain expedition of white men, Americans, who, so the rumors say, are taking their way into our country? It even appears that they begin to claim it as theirs."

"I have heard something of them," Natzoon managed to say. "My grandfather, Shawonoe, has received report that they are even now trying to reach this place."

"I have heard the same from some of the hunters," commented M'Gillis. He gave an order to the half-breed, "Have the men open the shutters over the loopholes in the stockade, so that the light of our fires may be seen in the forest. On a night like this, any traveler, no matter who he may be, needs all the help and guidance which we can give him."

He proceeded to enter into a great book the list of furs which Natzoon had brought, and put down, also, what the boy wished in return for them. Natzoon stated quite simply just how the old squaw

had smuggled the marten skins into his hands so that he might purchase a gun from their proceeds. The man named Grant laughed aloud, and even M'Gillis smiled as he put down the credit and told Natsoon that he should have the gun in the morning. Then he gave directions that the boy should be given food and a place to sleep amongst the other Indians.

As he turned from the table to seek out a seat by the fire, Natsoon became aware of a pair of glittering black eyes fixed very steadily upon him. A tall Chippeway, on the other side of the room, seemed to be marking, with especial and jealous attention, every move which the newcomer made, and also every word and smile which passed concerning him between the traders. He made no effort to come nearer or to begin acquaintance with the stranger; but even after Natsoon had taken his place beside the fire, he still stared at him with disconcerting steadiness. The willing interpreter presently returned and took his place at Natsoon's side, to tell him much of the trading establishment and of the people who dwelt there.

More than a hundred clerks, interpreters, and canoe men were in the services of this chain of trading stations, which spread its network over the whole of the lake and forest country and was slowly reaching down to obtain what share it could of the traffic along the Mississippi. The canoe men, Indians or half-breeds, their white blood being French or British, were used in such capacities as hunters, carriers of goods, and fighting men.

"They will do anything which they are bidden," the interpreter said, finally, and allowed Natzoon to guess to what lengths such bidding could sometimes go.

A few squaws did such women's work as was necessary at the different posts, there being no white women north or east of Lake Superior, so the man told Natzoon. The boy had never seen a white woman, in fact he had not really thought that white men had squaws. Certainly they were never seen following their masters on their journeys, paddling the canoes or bearing the burdens, as was the custom amongst his own people.

The time passed; the interpreter chatted on; the dark eyes of the Chippeway youth across the room stared steadily at Natzoon. The boy finally asked of his new friend,

"Who is that brave who sits yonder and never takes his glance from us?"

"That is Sagona," the other answered. "He is a kinsman of Shawonoe and is one of the canoe men here, a very stout fighting man but a demon for temper."

Natzoon's heart stirred at the thought that here was one of his own kindred, one moreover not very far from his own age. The Chippeway Sagona was taller than Natzoon, he was evidently a youth of very great strength, and he walked with the assured air of one who is a well-established warrior. Natzoon longed for an opportunity to have word with him, and wished from the bottom of his heart that

the other would make overtures toward acquaintance.

The opportunity seemed at hand, when, at a comparatively early hour, the whole company made ready for the night. In a long loft above the main hall, whither a certain warmth from the great fire had risen, the band of canoe men and Indian helpers were accustomed to sleep on straw and blankets spread out upon the floor. The interpreter pointed out to Natzoon the proper place for him to lie down, and then himself moved away, since the half-breeds gathered in their own portion of the great dormitory. Natzoon, with a sudden throb of excitement, noted that his Chippeway kinsman had drawn quite near and was preparing to lie down next to him in the row of sleepers. Quiet fell in the big building, such quiet as made even the crackling of the fire below to be heard plainly, or the rustling scurry in a far corner, when a rat ran through the straw.

Natzoon lay alertly awake, listening, and was presently rewarded by the sound of a low whisper close to his ear.

"Who are you?" the guarded voice of his bedfellow inquired. "They say that you are a grandson of Shawonoe, who is of my blood, also. It is plain to see that you are not all Chippeway. How have you chanced to come into our forest country?"

Natzoon replied with a certain caution; but the other pursued his questions and manifested great interest, by his voice at least, since his face was hidden in the dark. The younger boy's confidence was won at last, and he found himself pouring forth the

tale which accounted for his long journey. He told of the coming of Cloud and his son, of the arrival of the white men, of the council of the chiefs upon the shore of the Mississippi, and of the open and insolent hostility of Black Hawk. He told of Chichoba, and then of his own taking up of the task when Chichoba's plan had failed.

The other grunted with approval when he heard of Black Hawk's relentless enmity and of Natzoon's carrying the warning against the white men northward along the course of the Mississippi. He listened in a silence which marked his disfavor, when the story dwelt upon Wabashah, or had to do with Malcolm Cloud or with Natzoon's encounter in the forest with Zebulon Pike. Even through the dark, it was evident that he drew himself together in tense listening when Natzoon told of Black Hawk's terrible misadventure with the white men, and of the light thrown upon that event by the wild and wandering talk of Tauneen, the man who lived in exile amongst the People of the Leaves.

When the account was finished, when Natzoon had said all that he had to tell, Sagona spoke through the darkness,

"Repeat to me once again those words of your good friend, Chichoba; they are the truest of any in the whole of the tale. How was it that they ran—"There are many ways by which a company of white men can be swallowed up and lost forever in that country of lake and marsh and tall pine woodland.'—Yes, yes, that man spoke with rare wisdom. I think little of these white men. A few days ago

I stole down the shores of the Mississippi and saw them come blundering over the ice and snow. M'Gillis has said little and Grant, not much more; but it is rumored amongst all of the other men of the Fur Company that these Americans have come to do great harm to British traders and to visit even greater disaster upon all red men. It would be well indeed that our secret forest trails should see the end of their journey."

From a faint rustle, Natzoon could imagine that his companion was nodding to himself there in the darkness. A strange tremor went over the boy. He had not meant to tell so much; he had not really intended to reveal that plan of Chichoba's which would deal out destruction to the white men's expedition. He sat up hastily in the straw.

"Do not take too much heed of what I have said," he protested. "I am not quite certain now, after following the white men so long, that it were wise after all to bring about their death."

"You are young," responded the other with a tinge of patronage in his tone, "and with your father's blood dwells, perhaps, a certain weakness within you. It is no wonder that your heart fails you when you come so close to the end. But I am a true Chippeway, a child of the waters and the pines. I know neither fear nor respect for any man. Leave the matter, from this day on, to me. I will know how best to deal with the danger which threatens us all."

Natzoon lay back amid the straw with his wits racing, wondering what new power he had let loose

and where would be the end. A complete silence reigned everywhere. If his neighbor was not sleeping, it seemed that, at least, he wished Natzoon to think that he did so. Yet, once, when Natzoon stirred uneasily, a hushed whisper through the darkness ordered abruptly,

"Lie still, you fool. Can I make my plans while you writhe and twist and rustle so close beside me?"

The tone was very different from the one of eager interest with which the talk had started. The whispered voice matched the terrible look which had been upon Chichoba's face, when that savage man marked down his prey. What was Sagona plotting there so close to him? It seemed, at last, that Natzoon's momentous errand was to be carried out successfully and without any further effort of his own. If he were truly loyal to his people, his heart should be glad that he had done so well. And now, instead, doubt and misgiving lay cold and heavy upon him.

He must have slept fitfully in the end, for he was aroused first, by a great shout outside the stockade, then by voices and feet running to and fro below him, and finally, by the loud commotion of all the sleepers round about.

"There are men demanding entrance at the gate," cried some one. Every man roused himself to instant wakefulness, and the whole company went, in confused hurry, down the ladder-like stairs to the great room below. Somebody was building up the fire; men were hurrying in from the clerk's quarters; M'Gillis himself came striding through the

low open door. Natzoon saw the half-breed interpreter come through the crowd to his side and heard him say, close to his ear, in the hubbub,

"It is the white men, the Americans. They have found us even in the storm."

A moment after, the outer door was swung open, and the handful of voyagers came stumbling in. The driving, icy snow was frozen everywhere upon their clothes. Their feet moved heavily as if without feeling; and two or three of them held their hands to their faces, as though blinded by the ruddy light of the fire. They came to the middle of the room, all the others drawing back while M'Gillis advanced to meet them. Natzoon scarcely recognized their leader, Zebulon Pike, so covered was he with ice and snow, so bowed with weariness and pale with exhaustion. But the little black spaniel was cowering at his master's heels, so that it was plain that this indeed was he. There were six of them who stood there facing M'Gillis, while almost fifty men had come pressing into the great room and stood crowded all about the walls.

"What brings you here?" asked the trader.

The young leader pulled off his fur cap, showing his fair hair and giving full view of his thin, pale face. He looked about him at that crowded room of Indians, half-breeds, and British, all hostile, and all fighting men. A curious twinkle became visible in his clear blue eyes, as he looked straight into the deep ones of Hugh M'Gillis.

"We have come to summon you to account," he said. "In the name of President Jefferson of the

United States of America, we demand reckoning for this trade which you are carrying on in his dominions and without his permission. We are come to enforce his laws upon you, to which, so we have heard, you have hitherto paid no regard."

M'Gillis looked at him speechlessly for a moment, then his own eyes lighted; he struck his great hand upon his thigh and burst into a magnificent roar of laughter.

"You will do!" he cried. "Your government has sent a fitting messenger to seek us out."

Through Natzoon's mind there ran suddenly a name, that of one of the old heroes of Indian tales, Chantapeta, Heart-of-Fire. He resented it and sought to put it from him, but there it remained, clinging to that picture of the pale, weary, yet undaunted white man. "Heart-of-Fire!"

M'Gillis was speaking again.

"You have come a long way and through many dangers to present your President's compliments to us," he said. "If I mistake not, you have been near to perishing upon the way. We will see first what warmth and food and drink will do for you, before we talk further of presidents and laws and other such trifles."

CHAPTER XI

A TRIAL OF STRENGTH

M'Gillis looked about over the assembled men, who had been waiting in breathless silence to hear how he would receive the Americans. As the slow, broad grin spread across his face, as the sound of his words went through the room and those who understood English repeated them to those who did not, a great and swelling shout of laughter went up until the very beams rang with it. There was not a man there who did not appreciate the high spirit and the sense of ridiculous inequality of force, with which Zebulon Pike, almost at the point of perishing, even as M'Gillis said, had declared his defiant errand.

"Indeed, sir," said Grant, "we are here so far away from the world and its news, that we would welcome any stranger, even one who might wear horns and a tail, who would bring us tidings of what is going on, back where our own folk dwell. Can you tell us what that Napoleon who has begun to call himself an Emperor, is doing now? And how are those stiff-necked New Englanders digesting the new rules which England has laid down concerning neutral commerce on the high seas?"

Pike's answer was lost in the general clatter of tongues, as he and his men were hurried away to partake of those comforts which, as M'Gillis said, came before the concerns of laws and presidents.

There was no doubt that the men were all utterly spent with hunger and cold and that their long tramp through the deep snow had exhausted them to the very last of their strength. Yet, as Lieutenant Pike passed down the hall, he seemed sufficiently observant to notice a certain face amongst all those dusky and darker ones of the French Canadians, the half-breeds, and the Indians. His eyes met Natzoon's, casually at first, then with the more intent regard of a dawning recognition. He even turned his head to look back over his shoulder, but he bore a puzzled expression, as though he were not quite certain of where he had seen that special countenance before.

Natzoon, knowing that, to an unpracticed white man, all Indian faces look alike, had pressed unwarily close. He had not believed that Lieutenant Pike would know again the face and figure which he had seen only in the fitful interchange of firelight and shadow. But now he drew back and let other eagerly curious men crowd between them. He could see by the American officer's look that he was still uncertain of his recognition; but the boy resolved to be cautious, lest that certainty should become knowledge. As he slipped back to find an inconspicuous place in a distant corner, he looked up and saw the dark countenance of Sagona turning first toward him and then toward the white commander, with an expression which he could not fathom but which filled him with vague discomfort.

M'Gillis was too much occupied with his guests to pay much attention next day to the business of ex-

changing Shawonoe's furs, but one of the clerks arranged the matter with Natzoon and supplied him with a gun in exchange for the old squaw's roll of marten skins. He even presented him with a battered powder horn, with which Natzoon might carry away his purchase of ammunition. The boy looked over his new possession carefully.

"It is a good gun," he declared seriously, and the clerk responded,

"M'Gillis will not allow us to trade with inferior goods."

The worst of the storm had abated, but snow and wind were still driving through the forest, making the hazards of travel very great. The trader's clerk bade Natzoon wait until he could return to Shawonoe's village under more favorable conditions.

"And we can even give you employment here, should you choose to stay," he added. "We are always looking for good men, and we shall need some extra guides and carriers just now. This American, so he tells M'Gillis, wishes to go forward and find out the source of the Mississippi. He is so worn out, and all his muscles so strained from struggling through the deep snow, that he will not be able to stand upon his feet for another day; but M'Gillis will presently send him forward with a dog-sled and such men as are necessary to go with him. Do you know the way to Upper Red Cedar Lake?"

"I do not know the trails of this forest and lake country," said Natzoon, "but I would be glad to give you such service as I can."

"Well, we may need you to carry supplies. You look as if you had the proper strength and lightness to be a good man on such a march. We can spare but the one dog team to take the American officer. Sagona is going with the party, and he will be sufficient guide."

Natzoon had thought that several days must pass before the white commander would have recovered sufficiently to proceed farther; but on the next day the clerk gave him instructions to make ready, as the exploring party was preparing to go forward. They set out on a glittering and sparkling winter morning, with the bitter cold equalled only by the brightness of the sunshine upon the frozen snow. Only one or two of the American soldiers were to go with their leader. These were mounted upon snowshoes, and were making absurd and clumsy efforts to master the new means of locomotion, accompanied by much shouting laughter. But it takes only a short space of traveling to teach a man how to manage this unaccustomed footgear, so that presently the Americans were making as good progress as their companions. Lieutenant Pike, who rode upon the dog-sled, was still too lame from his long march to be able to walk any distance, but his impatience would not suffer further delay. It was evident that his greatest desire of the whole journey was to see that lake from which the Mississippi took its source; and it almost appeared that he was afraid, so one of the men commented, "lest it may be gone if he do not make haste to find it."

It seemed that Pike, with a single companion,

had pressed forward to the upper end of Leech Lake, which, as he himself had reckoned, was the cradle of the Mississippi. But now he had been told that a more remote source, still upon a navigable stream, was the Upper Red Cedar Lake, thirty miles farther. M'Gillis himself was to accompany him as well as two Indians, Sagona and Natzoon.

As they went out of the gate, Lieutenant Pike stopped and seemed to be voicing a protest of some sort to the commander of the establishment. M'Gillis argued, but at last threw up his hands with a sign of capitulation and gave an order to Sagona. From the tall flagstaff opposite the gate the Union Jack was fluttering. Very slowly the British flag came down, and the American Stars and Stripes crept up the staff in its place. The stockade was within the American dominions and had no right to fly any other flag than that of the United States. This was the same banner which had been rescued from the river by Le Petit Corbeau and his one-time enemy, the White Wild Goose. It spread its colors bravely to the winter wind and sunshine, above the low buildings and the tree tops.

M'Gillis stood frowning at it for a few minutes, then turned about with a clearing face.

"Justice is justice," he admitted. "We would do the same, were you within the British boundaries."

The two appeared to have come to an amicable agreement concerning the demands and regulations of the United States Government in the matter of British traders. That first moment of their meeting had settled whether they were to be friends or

enemies. Each having conceived respect and admiration for the other, there was little difficulty in arriving at peaceable conclusions.

Before they had moved many yards from the gate, they saw a large party of Indians approaching from the southward. There was a brief pause for parley; then the white men set forth northward once again and the Indians turned to enter the stockade. They were three Chippeway chiefs with their companions, who had come at the request of M'Gillis for a conference with the Americans. Lieutenant Pike had been utterly unable to establish any communication with the members of this northern tribe; but at the bidding of the influential Scotchman, the different head men were now streaming in from their villages. The council was to be held immediately after the return of the exploring party.

A long day's march carried them to the little lake lying so high upon the slopes of the Mississippi watershed that, at only a few miles distant, the rivers ran down to Hudson Bay. Through the last portion of the journey they had come into a fall of soft snow, in which the dogs floundered and made slow progress. Lieutenant Pike, in his impatience, dismounted from the sledge, put on a pair of spare snowshoes, which the party carried, and went forward on foot. It was obvious that he walked with pain, but it was equally plain that his restlessness was so great that he could not sit still upon the sledge and be carried behind the others.

The lake was surrounded by fairly open country, so that a single ridge beside it commanded its whole

shore line. The Lieutenant left the others and walked away alone up the slope to the crest and stood there, a single figure, dark against the paler gray of the twilight sky. Natzoon stood watching him, guessing a little of the young white chief's thoughts as he looked abroad and saw, at last, what he considered the answer to that riddle with which the Mississippi had puzzled him for so long.

The white man had come to his journey's end, he had accomplished that which he had set out to do. Yet how was it with Natzoon? Had his long crow's flight across hill and prairie and snow-buried forest brought him also to the fulfillment of his purpose? No, his task was yet undone. More and more vague had become his actual plans for the accomplishment of that deed, which, so he had earnestly promised, would surely be done. He glanced across at Sagona standing a few yards away and eyeing that soldierly figure with a cold and steady look. Was he measuring the distance for a long shot? Was he calculating what would be the feeling of M'Gillis should the bold officer, who had summoned him to account, drop suddenly upon the snow? Natzoon shivered as he tried to read that inscrutable copper face. But apparently the answer to Sagona's inward questions was not favorable, for he swung about and said to M'Gillis,

"If we are to take shelter before darkness comes, we had better tarry here no longer."

They slept in an outlying log house belonging to the trading company, where a half-breed Canadian and his Indian wife did such honors as the place

afforded. They ate sumptuously of white fish speared in the frozen lake and broiled at the back of the big chimney. They slept in their blankets upon the floor, and, so Natzoon was sure, one man amongst them dreamed happily of a longed-for purpose brought to its end at last. They tramped back under a dull sky the next morning, and found a great company of Chippeway chiefs awaiting them at the stockade.

By the appointed day for the conference, an impressive gathering had collected, for, once the Chippeway chiefs had begun to come in, rumors of the council ran everywhere, and no leader wished to be left out. They were, in appearance, very different from their more southern brothers, the Sac-and-Fox and the Sioux. They had no wealth of horses, since men must travel forest lands on foot. There was little magnificence of wampum, or jingling strings of metal and particolored war bonnets.

The chiefs, some of them, had decked their hair with painted feathers, some of them wore bright blankets, and a few had strings of colored beads. The struggle to preserve life was very great in a cold region and in a difficult hunting country, where the forest offered dense cover for the game. Here were no buffalo, that main support of the Sioux Indians' existence. The battle merely to keep alive left the warriors less time to deck themselves out in strutting grandeur, and afforded the toiling squaws little leisure for those elaborate embroideries of beads and dyed porcupine quills so much beloved by the Sioux and the Sac-and-Fox. Yet Natzoon, casting

his eye over the assembled ranks of chiefs and warriors, felt a glow in his heart as he saw the truth of what he had long heard in many quarters, that the Chippeways were indeed a finer-featured and handsomer race than any of the others. They were not so tall as the Sioux; they were slimmer and more graceful; their eyes were deeper both in color and expression; and the faces of all of them held a look of courage and of high spirit.

They listened intently to what the American commander had to say. He wished them to understand the friendship which all the Americans held out to them, so he said, and he desired that they should give up the flags and medals which the British had given them and offer whole-hearted allegiance to their American father.

The Sac-and-Fox had been openly hostile; the Sioux had been uneasy yet bound by the commands of Wabashah; and both had been evasive. But the Chippeway differed from them all. They were evidently not quite certain whether or not to believe in the proffered friendship of the Americans, and, since no man had laid any orders upon them, every chief followed his own impulse. Quite frankly and fearlessly each spoke the truth of what he thought.

The British had been good friends to them, so several of them said; if the Americans would be the same, then they would be well satisfied. A few were willing to give up their medals; more declared quite decidedly that they would wait until they saw which of their two allies, the British or the Americans,

might turn out to be the stronger—then they would make their decision.

“You both look to be good warriors,” was the cautious statement of La Guelle, the Flat Mouth, one of the principal Chippeway chieftains and a relative of Shawonoe. “The passing of a few moons will tell us which of you is more powerful than the other.”

The request which Lieutenant Pike had made at every Indian council he now put forward again. It was his deep and earnest wish not only to establish Americans and Indians upon a friendly footing, but also to persuade the red men to bring about peace among themselves, to put an end to that long warfare between Chippeway and Sioux, with its generations of bloodshed. As a pledge of this, he had asked everywhere that certain chiefs or warriors of one nation would accompany him on his journey into the land of their enemies, so that they might treat, along with him, for a final ending of hostilities. When he had asked this of the Sac-and-Fox tribe, he had been insolently denied. The chiefs of the Sioux, at the St. Peters River, had avoided direct refusal; they had all said that this was their season for hunting, or that the tribes which they represented might possibly be unwilling. The Chippeway, however, made no such effort to beat about the bush. The foremost of them said, bluntly, that no escort of Americans would be strong enough to keep their lives safe should they venture into the Sioux territory, and that they would be foolhardy beyond reason to risk such a journey.

Natzoon, standing by, saw a cloud pass over the Lieutenant's face. These were the last chiefs of whom he could make the request; if these should go with him, he might hope to gather a company of Chippeway, Sioux, and Sac-and-Fox to accompany him to St. Louis and there make a treaty, all together, for a general peace. He urged them again. He would pledge his life for their protection.

"You would but lose your life," the same chief assured him, "in trying to keep us from death. We have all seen that you carried your own safety lightly, or you never would have come upon such a journey—or asked such strange things of us."

Zebulon Pike looked about him desperately.

"Is there no one in all this company, chief or warrior, who will dare to make the southward voyage with me?" he asked. "I have heard of you, even amongst your enemies, as a very brave nation."

There was silence and then, suddenly, came a movement amongst the Indians crowded about. One tall figure stepped out before the rest.

"I will go with you. I am no chief; but I am the brother of this La Guelle, who advises caution. I will travel into the south with you."

It was Sagona who had thus offered. He cast a meaning look of defiance, and of warning to silence, in Natzoon's direction.

Hardly knowing how he came there, Natzoon suddenly found himself, also, standing out in the open space before the crowded spectators.

"I, too, will go with you," he cried.

Zebulon Pike was looking at him in puzzled bewilderment.

"Have I not seen you before?" he asked. "Are you not he who was half a Sac-and-Fox warrior?"

"I am the grandson of the chief Shawonoe," answered Natzoon. And then, with pleading as earnest as Pike's own had been and with such overpowering desire that he dropped all reserve, he added, "Oh, take me with you, for it is the desire of my heart to go."

If Lieutenant Pike had any suspicions concerning the good faith of his volunteer companion, he evidently put them aside. So very great was his wish to carry south with him an Indian ambassador of some sort, that he could not choose with any great criticism. In his acceptance of the first offer, he was far more cordial than in his manner toward Natzoon. He had looked inquiringly at M'Gillis, and the Scotchman had declared,

"That is our best guide, Sagona. He can show you the most direct and safest trails rather better even than I could do."

But of Natzoon the trader could say nothing, so that it was still with a certain reluctance that the Lieutenant finally agreed that he also should share their march. There was, nevertheless, a relieved smile brightening his face, for at last he seemed about to fulfill his long-cherished plan.

"We will set forth in three days," he said, "and you shall never regret the courage you have shown and the good faith, in offering to go with me."

Sagona did not look again at Natzoon, but slipped out of sight amongst his tribesmen.

In making arrangements for his further journey, Lieutenant Pike sought the advice of Sagona as to the best route and the best means of travel. Of Natzoon he asked nothing, but on that matter the boy did not complain, even within himself. He heard what Sagona had counselled. By traveling southeast, they were to reach the Mississippi at a point many miles lower than where the American expedition had left it for the purpose of striking through the woods toward the M'Gillis establishment. They were, moreover, to turn aside from their way and visit the smaller house of the trading company on Lower Red Cedar Lake, where, so Sagona assured him, they would find provisions. On this detour, therefore, they could travel lightly burdened, and could make good time.

"You are laying out some very long marches," said M'Gillis, when he heard of Sagona's advice. He had presented to Pike a sledge and a pair of dogs to help him carry supplies, and he had outfitted the whole expedition with snowshoes.

"Do not let the fellow push you to an Indian's swiftness of marching," the trader urged, more seriously, but Pike only laughed in return.

"We must not show ourselves less in courage and energy than the red men," he answered.

They set forth on a gray day of only moderate cold, with the dogs, the sledge and the five American soldiers. Sagona marched ahead to show the way, while Natzoon brought up the rear. He and his

kinsman had little talk during the days of preparation; they had, in fact, avoided each other, apparently with mutual desire. And now that they had entered upon their journey, they still kept apart, Sagona traveling with the white man and talking with him, since he had learned a considerable amount of English during his service at the trading establishment. Natzoon was quite willing to be left to march in silence behind the others. He wished to be asked no questions either concerning himself or his companion, and he was wrapped in a cloud of dark thoughts and direful misgivings.

It was plain that the long journey and especially the hardship of that final effort to reach the stockade had told heavily upon the American officer's strength. Part of the time he marched with the others upon his snowshoes; but for a portion of every day's journey he was obliged to let himself be carried upon the sledge, if he were to keep up with the others. Mr. Grant, the second in command of the trading company's establishments, had also given a word of warning against pressing on with too great speed. He had, himself, set off two days earlier, on a round of certain Indian villages, and had promised to meet them at the house on Lower Red Cedar Lake. The first day's journey went forward without adventure, as did also the second. The two Indians ranged afar into the forest and brought back much game, on which the travelers fared sumptuously. It was by Sagona's persuasion and guidance that they stretched their journeying to very long marches, but, as this suited the Lieu-

tenant's habitual impatience and as the men seemed fairly equal to it, there was no dallying upon the way.

As they prepared to set out on the third day, Sagona explained to the commander that they were nearer to the Mississippi than to the cabin on Cedar Lake. He proposed, therefore, that the five soldiers be sent forward with the supplies and the dog-sled, to follow a plain line of march down a certain valley, until they reached the main river; while Lieutenant Pike, Natzoon, and himself should march through the woods to the house beside the lake and there meet the trader Grant, according to appointment. Little Pluto, with pleading eyes and tail, begged to follow his master, but he was firmly commanded to stay with the main party.

Since the arrangements had been discussed and settled in English, Natzoon had no part in them. But when he found that the three of them were to set off into the forest without the escort of soldiers, his misgivings grew to the point of unquenchable protest.

"Where are you letting him take you?" he asked of Lieutenant Pike, and, when it was explained to him whither they were bound, he still persisted, "But that is too far!"

"We are not obliged to travel the whole of the way in one day's journey," Pike reassured him; but Natzoon only shook his head and replied,

"It is too far from your own men."

At this, Sagona burst out upon him with a torrent of abuse in his own tongue. They had talked so

very little during the whole of their journey, that, even up to that time, Natzoon was not quite certain of his kinsman's purpose in offering to accompany the white man. But now there could be no doubt of what he meant to do.

"Coward!" he cried, his fingers twitching to clutch his knife but prudence keeping him from open threat. "Have you gone this far and will now let the whole success of your journey slip through your fingers when it is close within your grasp? If you are willing to fail, I am not. And do not forget that I am better armed than you, that I know the country where you do not, and that it is I, not you, who will now lead this journey to its appointed end."

Therefore it was, that, on a windy day of fitful sunshine and very great cold, the three bade good-bye to the little group of soldiers and plunged into the trackless forest.

Natzoon observed that Sagona had set a pace that was almost imperceptibly quicker even than that by which they had traveled for the last two days. The boy himself was not very greatly accustomed to snowshoes, and found that he must make greater effort to keep up than he had made heretofore. He noticed, also, that the Lieutenant was exerting all his strength to hold the same speed as the other two. It was plain that the white man was unwilling to complain, and that he was putting forth every possible exertion to do as well as his companions. As for Sagona, he strode ahead with such ease and lightness that it seemed as though a week of traveling at this pace could scarcely touch his untiring

vigor. They made a brief stop at midday, where the way crossed a low ridge between the watersheds of two small lakes.

Natzoon was beginning to understand that the whole of the upper waters of the Mississippi drained a flat basin of enormous extent, where a myriad of lakes, of marshes, of tiny streams and pools held the snow and the rain, until it flowed away with gradually increasing volume into the big river, which passed his own village so many miles away. He had heard traders say that French and Spanish explorers, who had come across the stream at different points nearer and nearer to where it reached the sea, had given it varying names, Rio de las Palmas, Rio de Espiritu Santo, Rivière de St. Louis, but those titles had none of them lived. It was still called by everyone from the Chippeway name, Michi-Sibi, the Big River. It was the Chippeway country in which these vast waters found their being, it was the Chippeway's river whithersoever it might flow.

They crossed the frozen lake and felt the force of an icy wind which fell upon them fiercely in the open, so that they were glad to find shelter in the forest again. They must now climb a longer and a higher ridge to come into the basin of Red Cedar Lake. The short afternoon was waning even as they reached its summit, and the twilight was beginning before they had gone one third of the way down the long slope of the other side.

"We are not many miles from the cabin now,"

said Sagona. "We can easily reach it before it is quite dark."

"You are sure Mr. Grant will be there?" Lieutenant Pike asked. His voice was hoarse with weariness, and it seemed as though he must lift each foot with a separate and weary effort. Natzoon, walking behind him, noticed that the thongs of the snowshoes had so cut into his flesh that the blood was coming through at every step. Yet the boy knew that there was no use in reproaches or protests now, that there was nothing to do but to go forward. He himself was weary beyond telling; he made no effort to speak but followed at the commander's heels, wondering dully what desperate crisis they were to meet when they reached the cabin. And how was he to deal with it, when at last it came?

Down the long hillside they moved, in single file. Zebulon Pike stumbled openly, yet put forth cheery effort to make light of his fatigue, and joked over his sorry state.

"I am not your equal," he said to Natzoon, "and we neither of us can hope to be even one half the match for your kinsman, Sagona."

"He travels like a moose," agreed Natzoon, in his broken French.

"And he leaves all lesser animals, such as we, far behind him," replied Lieutenant Pike.

"The cabin should be there at the head of the lake," Natzoon told him finally, "but I see no light of any fire."

Sagona was taking no part in the talk, but stalked ahead with ever increasing strides. The Lieutenant

was finally forced to call after him through the dark,

"You must check your speed a little, my powerful friend, or you will lose your feeble comrades entirely in the snow."

Sagona restrained his haste somewhat, but he remained well in the lead. They came finally to the cabin, square and sturdy with its big logs and massive chimney but absolutely silent and deserted under the shining stars. The cold had grown bitterly intense, although the wind had died at sundown and the air was utterly still. Sagona fumbled at the latch, lifted it, and opened the door, that they might step within. The atmosphere inside was dank and cold, far chillier, it seemed, than the snow world outside. The Lieutenant staggered against the doorpost, attempted to stoop to unfasten his racquets, and dropped face downward upon the doorstone.

Natzoon knelt down to unfasten the straps and found them so soaked and stiffened with blood that he could scarcely release the man's wounded feet. His own fingers were so stiff that they could hardly feel the leather thongs, but he got the snowshoes clumsily free at last.

"Now we can lift him inside," he said to Sagona, but his companion made no move to help their commander across the threshold. Since it was evident that Lieutenant Pike had not sufficient strength to attempt even one more step forward, Natzoon fairly picked him up in his powerful arms and carried him within.

He spread out the American's blanket upon the rough floor of split logs, and found the hearth by fumbling in the dark. The cold cave of the fireplace was quite empty except for a drift of cold ashes between the firestones. No amount of groping about the cabin revealed any store of fuel, for it was evident that the last person who had been in that house had used it all.

"We must go out to gather firewood," he said and received only a grunt from Sagona.

Natzoon could see that the Chippeway was still standing in the open door, dark and ominous against the stars. It seemed as though he were looking down, with his fierce eyes attempting to pierce the blackness, as he turned toward the Lieutenant lying practically insensible upon the floor. Yet as Natzoon came toward him, he stepped backward, out into the snow, and, as the other followed, he closed the door. The two stood facing each other under the light from the glittering sky.

"Shall it be you, or I, who will make the final end of him?" he asked Natzoon. "I should like it to be myself, for he has a good gun and much else which I should rejoice to make my own."

The younger boy put out a hand to steady himself against the doorpost. Exhaustion and excitement made his wits reel for an instant; but the desperate necessity of the moment finally brought him courage and self-command once more.

"I have come so far," he said huskily, "it should be my right to strike the blow."

"I will have no treachery," cried Sagona, suspi-

ciously, "nor any faltering. You are almost as exhausted as that powerless thing lying yonder within. I do not think there is enough strength left in your hand to lift your knife."

"I will show you that there is," returned Natzoon. His mind had cleared completely; his thoughts were racing to the plan which should accomplish his end. He measured the superior height of Sagona; he observed that his gun was better than his own and his knife, longer.

"We will try," he continued slowly and clearly, "which of the two of us, even now, has the steadier hand. Take that white birch tree yonder for a mark and cast your knife at it."

He leaned his gun against the cabin beside the door and stepped out into the open, drawing his knife from its sheath. Sagona laid his own rifle in the same place and came out to stand beside him. The birch tree, showing clearly against the clump of dark pines, was a clean-cut target twelve paces away. The crowded clumps of pointed red cedars, which gave the lake its name, stood like groups of people, as though they waited and watched to see what was to come of this fateful matching of strength.

"You may try your skill first," said Sagona.

Natzoon lifted his knife. To his weary hand it felt unbelievably heavy, but with an effort quite beyond such strength as really belonged to him, he swung the hilt upward and flung with unerring aim. It sped in straight, keen flight and struck the birch tree halfway up the trunk.

Sagona stepped into his place, settled his feet in the same footprints in the snow, raised his arm, with its long reach, and flung his own knife. The aim was less true, for the blade merely grazed the slender trunk, and the knife dropped and buried itself up to the hilt in the snow. Yet neither of the two had time to note how it fell, for, on the instant that the weapon left his companion's hand, Natzoon swung himself about and grappled with Sagona in desperate battle for two lives.

The unarmed antagonists fought as wild animals fight. Sagona sought to crush his assailant in his great arms as a bear would have crushed him. Natzoon, with the lithe strength of a panther, twisted and turned, slipped out of his grasp, dropped back, and leaped upon him again. The snow was beaten hard under their trampling feet, as they staggered backward and forward. More than once Sagona had Natzoon fairly in his grip and closed his great iron embrace about him, until all the breath seemed to be squeezed from the boy's panting lungs. Then Natzoon would drop his knees, making a great jerk downward, slide from the other's hold, and fling himself upon him once more. His own effort was confined to the single aim of getting his two steel-fingered hands upon his enemy's throat and clinging there, until he was shaken off as a rat or a weasel is swung and shaken and cast aside by a larger and stronger foe.

Sagona had by far the bigger frame, the longer arms, the stronger muscles, but he was less quick and agile and less practiced in the feints, shifts, and

quick turns of such a mode of rough-and-tumble fighting. As for Natzoon, his friendless, troubled childhood among the Sac-and-Fox stood him now in good stead. Every boy who had called him "Pine Lynx," every growing lad who had whispered, "Forest Marten," behind his back, every young warrior who had dared to hurl at him the word "Chippeway" had been forced to give battle for that insult. A hundred fights had taught the boy quick play of grappling arms and tripping feet, had showed him how to judge an adversary's weakness and strength, how to resist him, to lead him on and wear him to exhaustion. There were no rules for such combat; it was a battle, to the last extremity, between two wild creatures who had no thought either of yielding or of mercy.

Natzoon's face was badly cut, where he had been flung against a tree, and the blood, in a wavering line, went trickling all down his body and stained the snow about his feet. Once, in the terrible grasp of Sagona, he had felt a sickening crack; and a lightning bolt of pain, which went tingling through him, told him that a bone was broken. What hurt he had inflicted upon the other he could not tell, yet he was dimly certain that those unyielding arms were a little less cruel, that those firmly set feet wavered a trifle as they sought new purchase on the trodden snow. At last his opportunity came, a leap and an upthrusting of his arms through Sagona's savage embrace. His hands closed on the other's throat, grasping it tighter and tighter, even as the arms encircling him seemed to crush the last

breath out of his exhausted body. He closed his eyes and clutched ever more fiercely, until he felt the great ropes of Sagona's muscles relax, until the iron hold loosened, until the tall figure wavered and suddenly pitched headlong into the snow.

Natzoon stood back from him where his enemy lay prostrate, and breathed deep into his empty lungs, which felt as though they would never be full again. With no great steadiness, he walked to the cabin door and took up the two guns, then made his way across the starlit space before the house to the birch tree and secured his own knife and Sagona's.

It was an awkward business to try to find and carry dry wood back to the cabin, with both the rifles on his arm; but he must manage it, for on fuel the lives of them all depended. He stopped once or twice as he passed Sagona, saw that he was still breathing, and went on about his task. He kindled a spark upon the hearth with flint and steel and presently had the gay light of yellow flames flickering through the whole of the cabin. How little impression the fire made upon the damp cold of the closed-up house, how long it seemed before any real warmth seemed to steal across the floor to where the white man lay!

At the end of the building was a small shed, built against the chimney and sharing a little in the warmth of the fire enclosed by its rough stones. When at last the cabin was beginning to seem light and warm, Natzoon went out and, with a great effort of his last strength, gathered up his fallen

enemy. He felt a fearful stab of pain through his side as he did so, but, none the less, succeeded in half carrying, half dragging Sagona into the tiny, dusty shed, where he dropped him down against the chimney and secured the door.

He knelt down beside Zebulon Pike, who had not changed his position, had not even stirred through all the time which had passed. Very gently and carefully the boy began to rub those half-frozen hands and feet. He searched through the Lieutenant's pack, found the same cup from which he himself had drunk at their meeting in the forest, and set it, full of snow, beside the fire to melt. He rummaged in the cupboards of the little house, discovered some hard bread and frozen cheese, and set these also beside the warm hearth.

He fed the fire bountifully, so that the draught of its heat fairly thundered as it went up the big chimney. It was not easy to find firewood, yet, bruised and aching as he was, he kept going farther and farther out into the snowy wastes to bring in further armfuls of the dry, fallen boughs which alone could keep life in the three of them. Hour by hour he kept toiling out into the chilly dark, while the trees snapped and crackled with the frost all about him, and while the frozen stars looked down from the infinitely remote arch of the sky. The cold was so intense that the air fairly stung his lungs. Nothing stirred, not a dry leaf in a sheltered hollow, not a pine bough weighed down with its white load, no single one of the creeping or furry animals, who are wont to seek their food under cover of the dark-

ness. In that bitter silence, it seemed as though the life of all the world had been frozen into stillness.

Between his expeditions into the outer cold, he made what attempts he could to tend the white man, who still lay unconscious on the blanket in the cabin. Zebulon Pike would revive now and again, speak a few words, then drift into insensibility once more. It was plain that, on the long march, he had driven himself to a pitch of exhaustion beyond any power of telling. With all the care of which he was master, Natzoon tended him, wishing a hundred times that he could be as gentle of hand and as skillful as Lieutenant Pike had been with him, when he himself had come to extremity. He attempted to administer food, but the Lieutenant was too exhausted to swallow the half-thawed cheese and bread, and could only manage a choking gulp or two of water. There seemed little indeed that Natzoon could do, and in the end he sat by, helpless, as the hours passed. He was quite certain that death was coming nearer and nearer to take the white man, and he felt himself utterly powerless to save him. All he could do was to heap more wood upon the fire and to wait. He was only dimly conscious of his own hurts, of the stab of pain when he moved suddenly, of the dull ache which had crept through his whole being. What was such small suffering, when the man beside him was in such desperate peril?

It must have been long after midnight when Lieutenant Pike opened his eyes and spoke.

"Do you think that this—is death?" he whispered, and Natzoon, knowing no usage save to tell the simple truth, nodded and answered,

"Perhaps, Monsieur," and then burst forth into a bitter cry, "If I only knew what would save you!"

The American looked back at him with a smile as faint as his whisper had been.

"We have come very far together," he said. "We will not let this be the end."

Again that heroic name which seemed to belong so inevitably to the white man, went marching through Natzoon's brain.

"Heart-of-Fire, Heart-of-Fire!"

Then, suddenly, it seemed that Zebulon Pike's very will to live was bringing back some life and strength to his failing body. But, as new circulation crept slowly through his benumbed veins, the pain must have been well-nigh unendurable. The agony was written upon his white, drawn face which never quivered, nor did his voice falter to betray his suffering. Whenever he opened his eyes, it was to smile at Natzoon; whenever he spoke, it was to joke with him, sometimes in French in an attempt to make his companion understand, sometimes in his own language, when only his un-failing spirit was intelligible to the boy.

Once he attempted to lift his head and laid it back upon the blanket as though in reeling weakness.

"Like—the kinnikinick," he whispered, with the feeblest of chuckles. And once, a little later, he managed to say,

"I told Wabashah of all that I would do in the north country. I wish that he could see—all this." Since he could not move his hands, his glance went about the bare cabin, to indicate how sharp was the contrast between what he had sought and what he had found. And then, suddenly, in a strange voice, he cried out, though under his breath,

"But I will not be beaten. I will show them all that I can win, all of them—even the river."

He seemed to lie more easily after that and to breathe more deeply. The stiff hands and feet which Natzoon had been rubbing, began to feel a very little like live things, and not as though they were cut from stone. He managed at last to swallow a little of the food and finally to move of his own volition upon the blanket. He looked up at Natzoon with the broadest smile which he had yet mustered, and he spoke almost aloud.

"I do not mind that the river mocked me. She has mocked us all."

He was silent then, with a quiet that seemed to be real sleep, for he breathed steadily deeper and more regularly, moved once to an easier position, and, finally, by the peering light of the yellow flames, showed some tinge of color in his haggard face. Natzoon sat beside him, immovable, counting his breaths, holding his own when one hesitated or faltered, devouring with his eyes the sight of that faint, slowly returning flush which told, in plainly written legend, how death was being crowded back by reviving life. Once or twice he heard Sagona stir, or groan aloud in the little room behind the

chimney; but he never left his place, never moved except to replenish the fire. His head dropped upon his knees, at last, and he slept also, to awaken only when a red winter dawn showed behind the window and when voices came in to him over the snow. He got up, almost too stiff to move, and saw six men, Grant and five companions, on snowshoes, coming, with their long, easy, shuffling stride, across the hill.

CHAPTER XII

SINGING WATERS

Spring does not come early in the northern forest. There is no better schooling for an impatient spirit than to wait week by week and then day by day, while the snow still lies thick and white everywhere and the ice still binds the streams into silence. And then, suddenly, there are long days of warm sunshine, a great burst of birds' voices, and the relentlessly frozen snow and ice go rushing away in a loud tumult of overbrimming, singing streams.

Zebulon Pike, as he waited that long six weeks which passed before the ice-fortified country surrendered to the spring, learned a lesson of patience which stood by him all through the rest of his life. A man may wait for other men and seek uneasily to make them hasten, but when he waits for weather, river and forest to do his will, he must school himself to curb his impetuous hurry. Desire for haste avails him nothing. A good portion of the time was needed to restore his full strength, and the rest was filled with preparations for re-embarking so soon as the ice opened in the river. Always, the one thought in every mind, through every day was, When will the spring come?

With Grant's assistance, he had managed to get back to his own men, waiting for him where they had reached the Mississippi. He had traveled forward slowly for a few days, carried upon the dog-

sledge, but later had put on his snowshoes once more and had managed to march forward with the rest. How different was their progress now from that weary struggle northward, when they had known nothing of how to travel in the snowy forest, when they had tried to drag the canoe and had floundered, knee-deep and over, in the drifted snow. The record of that desperate battle to press onward was shown by the line of camping places which they were passing now, covering in an hour as much distance as they had formerly been able to compass in a day. Mr. Grant went with them a part of the way, but left them to visit certain villages and chiefs scattered through the woods and lakes. He returned later to meet them at the winter camp on Swan River, where the boats and the greater number of men had been left. These two, Zebulon Pike and the tall, dark-haired Canadian trader, had now become the warmest of friends.

In that ruddy winter dawn, Pike had awakened in the cabin, to find Grant bending over him and with no sign of any other person near.

"Where are the Indians?" the Lieutenant had asked at once.

"I saw but one," Grant answered. "That man of ours, Sagona, was lying behind a barred door in the storeroom back of the chimney. When we set him free, he came shambling out, picked up his gun from the chimney corner, and was off across the ridge without a word. He looked a battered and crest-fallen warrior indeed; it was evidently not safe to press him to the telling of what had happened."

"And the other?" insisted Pike. "Where is the younger one, the Sac-and-Fox?"

Grant looked bewildered.

"I saw no other. Yes, I remember now, there was a shadow of somebody slipping away into the cedars as we came close. One of the men shouted but got no answer. We might have thought it was only some wild creature moving among the trees, except for the line of snowshoe prints the fellow left behind."

He went out to stand for a little while before the door, to study the trampled snow and the flecks of red here and there, where blood had splattered the crust of white. If he read the story of the desperate encounter which had there taken place, he could never, by any chance, have guessed the motive. Robbery, he concluded, must have been at the bottom of the whole misadventure. He had long known that Sagona was a little-tamed savage, who, in his heart, bore no goodwill toward white men, and who was capable of plotting any treachery against them.

"This ends his service with the Fur Company," he concluded.

But of that other, the stranger who called himself grandson of Shawonoe and yet seemed only half a Chippeway, of him he could make nothing.

"I believe," he said wisely, as he came back into the cabin, "that those two had no notion of going with you into the south country as messengers of peace. I think they only took this march with you to measure your mettle, and have now gone back to

their own people to tell them what manner of man you are."

Sagona had, indeed, gone back to his own tribe, nor did he offer himself again for employment with the trading company. He did not tell even his own kinsfolk a great deal of what had happened on that journey through the forest; but certain facts were finally got from him by the force of much curious questioning. He had told the assembled chiefs, before he set out, that his object in going was much as Grant had expressed it, "to try the mettle of the white man." He had been willing to admit that the American had suffered and stumbled on without faltering or complaint, that, though his strength was not equal to the Indians', his stoical endurance and his fortitude were as unfailing as their own. And for this courage, the fame of Zebulon Pike lived long among the Chippeway tribes.

Although that peace for which Pike had so greatly hoped and labored was broken by quarrels and bloodshed, occurring intermittently through the course of many years, it was quite true that, with the slow drifting in of settlers along the Mississippi and its tributaries, there was far less of battle and butchery than might have been foreseen. One man had made an attempt to understand Indian ways and ideas; one man had impressed upon their half-civilized minds the fact that the Americans could be just, fair, and brave. The influence of the first-comer into a new country is felt long after his name has been forgotten. There have been many settlers who have lived peaceably on their farms and home-

steads in that beautiful, lake-dotted Minnesota country, and have owed a life of prosperity and peaceable relations with their red neighbors to a man whose name they have barely heard.

Zebulon Pike never knew that he had not reached the real source of the Mississippi. That secret the river still held from him, with her old habit of mocking deception. She was, indeed, a friend of the Indians rather than of the white men; she was the Chippeways' river, as long tradition had established. Not until years later, when there came another man who, like Zebulon Pike, strove to understand the ways, the nature, and the hearts of those forest dwellers, did the river reveal her last secret and allow him to establish finally the fact that it is in the small, blue Lake Itasca and the tiny pool beyond, that the great river in reality takes its source. Yet, so far as his original purpose was concerned, Zebulon Pike reached his goal. That thrifty President and his advisors, who thought that they could buy running water, had conceived the Mississippi as an orderly stream, flowing from north to south, with an established line of direction, as a proper stream should flow. The young officer had been told to find the northernmost waters of that river and thus establish the extent of the waterways of the Louisiana Purchase. He had, indeed, explored the farthest-flung loop of the stream, where it reaches its highest point in the northern forest. He had fulfilled his official purpose in his exploration of the new dominions of the United States, although he missed the fact that the river, at the place of its

birth, flows from south to north for a space, before it swings about on its long and devious journey from the cold lake country to the tropic regions of the Gulf.

When the American commander reached the stockade on Swan River, where the greater number of his company awaited him, he discovered that Sergeant Kennerman had been an untrustworthy substitute. The man had abused his authority, had wasted supplies, and had stirred up the enmity of the few Indians who, from curiosity, had ventured near to visit their little fort. Yet such harm as he had accomplished was finally mended, and there began busy preparations for the southward voyage. Everything was shortly ready for the expedition to set its face homeward the moment that the ice should break.

There was no lack of Indian company now. Word had gone forth to every Chippeway band that the assembled chiefs and the British traders had given their friendship to Zebulon Pike. Visits were exchanged with all the chiefs who dwelt near to the stockade and who had only watched and peered from behind the pine trunks when the expedition had first gone northward. The Lieutenant was everywhere offered presents and pledges of goodwill. What he liked even better was that he was able to have long and earnest talks, through the interpreters, with certain chiefs, who shed light upon the mysterious Indian ways in war, in peace, and in the simple beliefs which made up their religion.

“In winter we must do little else but hunt, for the

meat and furs which mean life and wealth to us," one of them, Wiscoup, explained to him. "But in spring, when the game is more plenteous, when the green leaves cover the thickets and make hiding places for warriors, when the life runs quick and tingling through the body of every young brave, then we can scarcely hold back our feet from the warpath. But this spring," here he sighed a little, "there will be no war—because of you."

In one matter, however, he could get never a word of information, in spite of the questions which he asked everywhere. Had they seen anything of an Indian boy, half Chippeway, half Sac-and-Fox, tall, but not yet fully grown? They had not. Or, if they had, they did not tell him. There are few things which an Indian does so well as to keep a secret.

From the moment that he had fallen asleep in the cabin, he had lost all sight and trace of the Indian boy. Yet he still had the vague consciousness of being followed; he still saw, on occasion, a moving shadow behind the trees. Sometimes, when he went out to hunt, and camped alone at night, he would build his fire high and wait long in wakefulness beside it, hoping that a certain quietly stepping stranger would slip out of the dark to sit near him again. But Natzoon never came.

Sometimes Pike would say to the little dog blinking in the warmth and brightness of the fire,

"Pluto, can you not find him?"

If Pluto ever saw Natzoon and talked to him, in his own way, in the depths of the wood, he had no means of telling his master.

Once, it seemed to Lieutenant Pike that, as he walked through the forest in the long twilight of the northern spring, a quickly gliding figure was slipping out of sight not many yards away in a grove of sugar maples. He lifted his voice and called, since he knew no name for his friend of the forest,

“Boy of the black crow’s feather, come back to me, come back.”

The shadow only moved the more quickly, and was gone before he could call again.

At last there arrived the day when the snow had shrunk to scattered patches, when the ice had broken and the river was running free. The boats were launched, the supplies loaded. The Indians watching on the bank raised a long cry of farewell and the southward voyage was begun. How the current carried them now, where once it had struggled and battled to drive them back! The rapids, round which they had formerly portaged with infinite toil, were now flowing so deep that the boats could go coasting and plunging over them to the still pools at the bottom. The Falls of St. Anthony made a roaring cataract of splashing clouds of spray and muddy foam. Here they must disembark, for no boat could ride those rapids and take the dive down to the deeper river.

It was a quieter journey which followed in the broader reaches of the stream, as it wound in and out amongst the soft, green hills. The river was in moderate flood, rippling in amongst the willows and the thick-rooted swamp maples and elms. Mile after mile it fell behind them, looking now like a

safe and familiar road, the road which would take them home.

They came into the upper end of Lake Pepin, spread their sails as they had done before, and went flying down the long expanse of blue water, quiet now by rare chance, except for the soft ruffling of the downstream breeze. A hidden current had carried their course close inshore, below a stony headland bare of trees. Even as they came near, Pluto suddenly leaped from between his master's knees and uttered an excited yelp of recognition. A tall, dark figure stood above them among the rocks, a slim Indian boy with his hair blowing in the wind. Upon catching sight of him, Zebulon Pike also sprang up in his place, at the risk of upsetting the boat, and sent a glad hail across the water. The Indian called loudly in his own tongue and lifted his arm in a gesture of frankly joyful greeting.

The Lieutenant caught at the tiller to bring the boat about, but wind and current bore it on so that it passed quickly below the cliff. Yet both those good friends in the stern could see plainly their comrade of the forest, could make out the very shining of his eyes and the radiance of his smile. He raised his hand and launched something through the air with skillful aim. It was a black crow's feather which rode gaily down the wind and landed in the boat, close to the feet of Zebulon Pike.

Once more the boy called and repeated something across the widening stretch of water. One by one the Lieutenant made out the syllables,

"What does it mean?" he said to his interpreter,

who sat close to him. "Chantapeta. What is that word?"

The man searched his memory for some minutes.

"I have it now," he declared at last. "It is the Sac-and-Fox name for a certain great warrior of long ago, who dared all manner of perils for the good of his tribe, and who stands to them for all that is brave and honorable. That is it—Chantapeta, Heart-of-Fire."

Zebulon Pike looked back, but the distance was growing greater and greater; the figure, standing immovable with one hand still up-raised, grew small and smaller and was at last hidden from view by the curve of a wooded hill. How few times had he seen that tall Indian boy whose name, even now, he did not know. Even fewer times had he heard him speak, once in defiance, once in comforting gentleness, once in a single cry of welcome and farewell. And yet he felt that here was a friend whom he was loth to leave behind, one whom he would remember as long as he lived.

Natzoon stood looking out from the cliff, long after the boat had disappeared, long after there was nothing before his eyes but running water and empty sky. But indeed, he saw nothing, except an inward vision of a kindly, courteous soldier beside his campfire, with a small, eagerly affectionate dog pressing close to his knee. Yellow sunshine, the blue of river and sky, the gay, spring green of the wooded hills, were all invisible to eyes which saw only orange

firelight flickering on pine trunks, a white waste of snow faintly visible in the shadows, and a circle of brightness which showed the bravest and friendliest face which he had ever known.

He had once followed the expedition of the white men to accomplish their destruction; he had now been striving to keep pace with them for what protection he could give.

After the struggle beside Cedar Lake, he had made his way to Shawonoe's lodge, where he had been tended by the bent old squaw, in spite of his grandfather's growling protests. It took no great number of days for his broken ribs to begin to mend; he spent a few more hunting and fishing, so that he might bring home to the old woman a certain store of furs and food to repay her for all that she had done for him. By great good fortune there crossed his path, on the second day of his hunt, a big, shambling bear with a coat of an unusual and beautiful shade of yellow brown. Its winter den must have been overdamp, or it had heard the call of spring too soon, for it was the first of its kind to walk abroad that year.

It was not so much expert, as desperate, aim which carried Natzoon's long shot and brought down the great, shaggy animal. With infinite effort, he dragged it back over the snow and was well rewarded for all his labor, when he saw the old squaw's eyes glisten as he laid down his quarry before the lodge door. How quickly she ran to call Shawonoe, crying,

"See what he has brought us, the boy whom you have so despised!"

It was not only that the pelt was a valuable one for the purpose of trade, but it seemed also that there was a belief that good luck dwelt, through all the season, with that household whose hunter brought down the first bear in the spring.

After this had been accomplished, Natzoon felt bound by no further debt, and could turn his thoughts once more toward wayfaring and toward the encampment of the white men. His fears lest they should have departed were quieted as he came down the still-frozen Mississippi. The ice had held them and would hold them still for many days more. He knew of every move which Zebulon Pike made during that period of waiting; he watched with hungrily eager eyes, as the young officer came and went about the business of his command. And Natzoon, being wiser in wood lore than Pike, felt the spring thaw coming, knew when the ice would break, and was off on the southward march a day in advance of the Americans. He was certain that the journey would be a swift one and that he would have much ado to keep abreast of the boats, even though, once again, he traveled as the crow flies.

Their progress, as they sped downstream on the crest of the spring flood was, indeed, too rapid for him to follow the whole of the way. After pursuing them into Wabashah's country, he found he must suffer them to pass beyond his reach. They were quite safe, so he knew, in the lands over which the wise Sioux chief ruled. Amongst the Sac-and-Fox,

he, Natzoon, could do nothing now, so that here he must be content to be left behind. He was steadily confident that the courage and spirit which had carried Zebulon Pike in safety through that forest journey would keep him secure through the remainder of the way. The young American would return to his own land, with no evil befallen him or any of his company, and with a knowledge of only half of the perils through which he had passed. It was pain almost beyond bearing for the Indian boy to see them pass and to think that he should never see that gallant friend again; but it was joy, indeed, to know that he was safe.

He turned about, at last, from looking after them, with the whole of his grief compassed in one, great, quivering sigh. It was not until then that he observed, with a start, that a Sioux warrior had come out of the thickets and was sitting on the grass, with his gun lying beside him. From long gazing into the sunny sky, the boy's eyes were dazzled for a moment, so that his first guess was that this person who had approached so silently must be Nuneska, from whom he had parted at that very place. But the figure before him was smaller and more closely knit, and the eyes, which were now upon his face, had a searching keenness which was unmistakable. It was Wabashah.

"Where is your crow's feather?" he asked abruptly.

Natzoon smiled defiantly, as he answered, "I cast it away, and the white man is carrying it back to his own country."

"So the white man and his band are returning alive! And did you learn anything on that long journey to the north, oh messenger of death?"

"I learned much which I shall never forget," Natzoon agreed. "I—I will never think again as once I did."

Wabashah's look took on a faint expression of approval and satisfaction. "And that tribe mate of yours, Tauneen, did he also teach you anything of value?"

Natzoon shuddered at the memory of those hours spent in the medicine man's hut, of the truths which he had heard there and for which he had very nearly given his life in payment. He could only nod in response to that last question.

"He must have made clear to you that you were wrong in thinking all white men to be alike and all of them false and cruel. The greatest wrong of which you had heard was, after all, not a white man's doing, but an Indian's. Was it not so?"

Natzoon nodded again.

"White men are not all alike, as we of the red peoples are so willing to believe," Wabashah declared. "In your own tribe there is, here, a man who is a wise and fearless hunter, there, one who is mean and thieving. You have in your village warriors who do brave deeds in defending their tribe and yet seek no glory for it, while there are others who dare little and say much, afterward, of how greatly they have battled."

"How did you know?" demanded Natzoon.

"Because," smiled the Sioux chief, "there are such

men in my own tribe and village and amongst all the Indian nations, just such, also, amongst the bands of the whites. But as for that one," his hand moved to indicate the direction in which Zebulon Pike had gone, "as for him, there are not many of his kind that we shall ever see. His like is not to be found again, though you search for the moons of a whole long life."

"Will he go safe, do you think?" asked Natzoon, looking out also across the river which looked so bare and lonely now, since he was never again to see that white sail against its blue.

"He is safe," Wabashah answered with conviction. "He has won the hearts of my own people, and of the Chippeway, also, so I hear. The Sioux can never be at peace long; they will rise to fight the white men once more after his time—and mine. But there will be less blood spilled and fewer scalps taken, because of this journey which he has made."

"And the Sac-and-Fox people," Natzoon said; "can you think what they will do?"

"My guess would be that Black Hawk will never face that white man again," Wabashah observed shrewdly. "Your chief received the strangers with scornful pride; he allowed, without protest, certain efforts to be made for destroying them. But the young white chief, in spite of all that the hostile Sac-and-Fox leaders can do, is coming back in safety. Therefore, so I foresee, the great Black Hawk will be gone on a hunting expedition and the white men will see only empty villages, as they

voyage past the Rock River and the Des Moines. The rapids will be full of water and very easy to pass, and there will be no man to dispute the white men's going."

Wabashah's keen mind could, indeed, look into the future and hazard a guess as to what was to happen. Black Hawk's behavior was just as he had foretold. Since the Sac-and-Fox chief could not hinder or destroy Zebulon Pike, he chose to ignore him, and was absent in far hunting grounds when the big boat once more passed his village.

Yet it was only concerning the people whom he knew and whose thoughts he had studied, and only for a little time into the future that the wise Sioux chief could divine what would come about. He could not look so far as to see that Black Hawk, because of his unforgiving enmity to the white race, would some day be disgraced, defeated, and even be disowned as leader by his own tribe. He could not see that, while he himself and Black Hawk would be remembered here and there into the coming years, the real and enduring memory of history would dwell on persons very different. He had little thought of those fugitive Iowa warriors, who had been conquered and driven forth by a fiercer nation, they who yet loved those pleasant lands between the Mississippi and the Missouri and must steal back to them now and again, at the risk of death at the hands of cruel enemies, until there were none left even to return again. It was they who gave their name forever to the hunting grounds which had once been theirs. Because of their great love

for their own green country, that land was called by their name for all time. But of these matters, the two Indians there above the river could know little.

Natzoon had turned away. When the talk began to touch his father's people, then indeed his heart must grapple with a bitter problem. He was so long silent, with his face hidden, that Wabashah spoke at last and very gently.

"What path will you follow now, O son of the Crow?"

"Where can I go?" The despairing cry was wrung from Natzoon, in spite of himself. "The Chippeway would not have me, nor did I wish to abide with them. And I swore that I would accomplish the white man's ruin or would never come back to my father's village."

It seemed to him that all he would ever feel of happiness and friendship had been carried away in that winged vessel which had disappeared beyond the hill. Yet his life still stretched before him, and he knew nothing of what he should do with it.

"Where shall you go?" repeated Wabashah. He seemed to be reflecting for long minutes, then finally he arose and said, "There is a way of which I know. Come with me."

He walked away through the sparse woodland which covered the bluff, while Natzoon, too miserable to wonder, followed obediently behind him. They crossed a ridge and saw a long, open slope, dropping to a creek, whose smooth bottom lands were like a garden in their flowery green. Beside

the stream, two men were building a fire, neither of them Indians, as was evident even at that distance.

"Go forward," said Wabashah, who had stood still. "When you come close, you will know what it is that you should do."

Natzoon, hesitating and reluctant, went slowly down the slope. A rising wreath of smoke made the two figures indistinct, so that, even as he descended, he was not sure who they might be. And he told his bruised heart that he wished to have no more to do with white men, as long as he lived.

The taller of the two had ascended the lower slope to look for fuel, so that, when he glanced up, Natzoon was able to recognize the smiling, dark face of the Frenchman, Milor. And the other? As a puff of wind scattered the smoke, the second of the two looked up also, and Natzoon saw the serious face and the direct, gray eyes of Malcolm Cloud. There flashed through him the whole memory of their talk beside the river, of what the trader's son had said that he hoped to accomplish, and of his wish that Natzoon might help him.

Malcolm, at the same instant, saw and knew again his comrade of that morning's hunt so many months ago. His grave face lit with sudden happiness, and he raised his voice in a great shout of welcoming. Natzoon's feet faltered no longer; he called out gaily in return, and ran swiftly down the hill.



